

**Old tunes for new times: contemporary Scottish  
nationalism and the folk music revival**

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I declare that this thesis has been composed entirely by myself, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the complex of relationships between the contemporary drive for Scottish self-determination and the performance of Scottish folk and traditional music. The central argument of this work revolves around A.P. Cohen's (1996) notion of personal nationalism, which posits that individuals make the concepts of nation and nationalism relevant to themselves through daily experience and practice. Rather than examining or attempting to define Scottish nationalism as an internally homogeneous movement, this thesis focuses upon the ways in which various types of nationalist sentiment are created, expressed, and shaped through a particular form of cultural performance. Thus it is argued that there are numerous types of nationalism in Scotland, ranging from the Scottish National Party's explicit calls for political independence to artistic and cultural expressions of "Scottishness" which may or may not be directly connected to specific party-political objectives.

As an ethnographic study of largely amateur folk music performers in Edinburgh, this work examines the role of music and musical performance in everyday life. It argues that, for these individuals, music and music-making are central in the formation of a sense of both personal and social identity. Through the performance of music which is symbolically linked to aspects of Scottish history, geography, cultural tradition and language, these performers see themselves to be performing aspects of Scottishness: a national identity which cannot be objectively defined but which is continually shaped and re-shaped through cultural practice. The Scottish musical traditions are discussed as ones which the musicians perceive to be still "living" and changing, rather than as historical artefacts to be preserved.

This thesis draws upon the interdisciplinary studies of contemporary Scottish politics, society, and culture and, based upon fieldwork conducted from August 1996-October 1997, is historically situated in a time of political change. It utilises theoretical discussion from recent anthropological and ethnomusicological studies, which treat music as an evolving social process rather than a finished cultural product. Finally, it occupies a place within the growing anthropological literature dealing with identity and cultural consumption, production and performance in urban, industrial or post-industrial life.

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## I: Introduction

From *Looking for the possible dance* by A.L. Kennedy:

The Ceilidh: notes for those new to the country or otherwise uninformed.

The purposes of the ceilidh, a uniquely unsullied flowering of Scottish culture, are many. Among these are the taking of spirituous liquors, the singing of songs, the playing of music, dancing, joking, wynching, fighting, greeting, eating stovies and looking at the moon while vomiting or contemplating the certainty of death. These activities are both tempered and inflamed by the presence of musical instruments, weans and men and women, each of the opposite sex.

Some activities, such as eating and singing, or fighting and looking at the moon are often considered mutually exclusive. Others, such as the taking of drink and greeting, or the singing of certain songs before a fight would seem to be inseparable.

The truth of the matter is less simple. Within the ceilidh, in its twists and turns of temperaments and times, all things may coincide. A woman may drink and fight while joking, a man may vomit while eating stovies and having a good greet. And in the process of wynching, anyone may do anything at all.

As ceilidhs are often mistaken for purely musical affairs, some mention must be made of this part of their nature. Instrumental music for a ceilidh must inspire either greeting or dancing, or both, and preferably have a title in the Gaelic. Songs may deal with a range of suitable topics, for example: dying at the fishing, dying at your work, or dying at the wars. You may also brush against the beauties of nature, the lot of the common man and the bitter death of heroes. The remainder of songs will deal, very often in Scots, with getting your hole, not getting your hole, getting your hole and not wanting it, wanting your hole and not getting it, liking your hole having got it, liking your hole but wanting it better, one man getting his hole with lots of women, one woman getting her hole with lots of men, sailors, true love and having babies.

As the Israelites in slavery had their psalms, so we have the ceilidh. As the Africans transported to Haiti kept their voodoo, so we have the ceilidh. As every languageless, stateless, selfless nation has one last, twisted image of its worst and best, we have the ceilidh. Here we pretend we are Highland, pretend we have mysteries in our work, pretend we have work. We forget our record of atrocities wherever we have been made masters and become comfortable servants again. Our present and our past creep in to change each other and we feel angry and sad and Scottish. Perhaps we feel free (Kennedy 1993; 145-6).

### **Perhaps we feel free: first notes**

The Scottish Gaelic word *ceilidh* (pronounced 'kay-lee') means a visit or a gathering. In contemporary, non-Gaelic discourse, a ceilidh now tends to refer to an evening of Scottish folk dancing. The Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh hold ceilidhs two or three times a month, generally in aid of Greenpeace or Amnesty International or other similarly well-known causes. These events nearly always sell out in advance and the well-dressed crowds, of up to four hundred people, dance and sweat and drink beneath the ornate cornices and crystal chandeliers of the Georgian ballroom. The Assembly Rooms ceilidhs, popular as they are, are politically correct and generally good clean fun. People are there primarily to dance and the wynching that happens generally does so in a subtle manner worthy of a middle-class Edinburgh crowd. A few of the serious dancers come equipped with mineral water and towels, and the band is always finely tuned.

Kennedy's ceilidh is a different kettle of fish altogether. She retains something of the older use of the word yet places her ceilidh firmly in a contemporary urban (and particularly Glaswegian) setting. I have been to a few ceilidhs at other venues in Edinburgh that resemble (though do not quite rival) what Kennedy describes. Spontaneously formed packs of children run about the floor between dances, the bottles of whisky won in the raffle are consumed on the spot, and sometimes the band does play out of tune. Most of the faces are familiar ones and dance partners are easily found, not always as easily turned away. Some people drink too much and fall down on the dance floor or upset tables. As Kennedy writes, it is about much more than just dancing. It is about being men and women, about being part of a community, and about being Scottish.

Kennedy concludes her passage with the statement “Perhaps we feel free.” “Free from what?” is the question she begs. I am not sure; most likely she has been deliberately ambiguous. Free, if only for the night, from the shackles of unemployment or drudgery of employment; free from the usual social rules governing proper behaviour; free to imagine oneself in another time or place: these are all possibilities. Perhaps her freedom is a more overtly political one. This too is possible, although I suspect Kennedy would agree that politics operate continually within the multi-layered workings of daily life and are not simply confined to the chambers of Government.

Ceilidhs are full of politics. There are interpersonal politics, of course, and cultural ones as Scottish tradition and cosmopolitanism compete and become interwoven. Nationalism in any number of forms, from the most intangible sense of patriotism to the most charismatically phrased party-political argument, is also there, at some times implicit and at others publicly vocalised or displayed. People negotiate their individual identities within these different levels of politics in quite a powerful manner.

There is a dance called “Strip the Willow”, which anyone who has been to a ceilidh will most likely have done. It is common for bands to conclude an evening with the Shetland or Orcadian version of the dance, in which everyone in the room gets into two long lines, men facing women. A few bars of the first jig are played and the dance starts with the first couple in the line spinning each other for sixteen beats. Then they split and spin with the next man and woman in the line, come back together, split again and spin the next two, thereby becoming increasingly dizzy and making their way toward the other end of the line. After they have progressed a little



way down the line, the next couple starts, and so it continues. The people waiting in the lines clap and wait to spin the bodies that come flying toward them, and sometimes have to direct the ones that have become dizzy or a little lost.

Watching the dance from outside, it is difficult to see the complexities of what happens within it. But within the dance, all sorts of things happen. People do not just spin each other and trot prettily toward the end of the line. Each individual does something slightly different. Some people clasp each other and move as elegantly as ballroom dancers, others birl each other so forcefully that their feet nearly leave the ground. Some people simply walk quickly from one partner to the next, others skip or stumble, some say nothing and others greet everyone that passes them. Some yell and throw their arms into the air. At one ceilidh, a friend of mine once called out lines from *Star wars* every time he passed me.

*"Stay in attack formation, Luke!"* he yelled as we went flying by each other. *"Help me Obi-Wan!"* I nearly lost my balance for laughing and people must have thought us either very drunk or very strange. Country dance aficionados tend not to like such departures from the protocol of the dance; hilarity and individualism are not part of the choreography. But although faces blur as one is passed from one set of arms to the next, people like to stand out from the crowd and to leave their individual mark on the dance. Within Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* (1985), there is an implication that, during ritual, individuals lose their personal identities to merge briefly with a larger social one, and so emerge again transformed. In the ceilidh, there is a very physical sense of being part of the group but the individual never ceases to *be* and is, rather, performed quite enthusiastically. One is highly aware of being seen by the other dancers.



In the summer of 1996, I set out on anthropological fieldwork to investigate the connection between the rise of nationalism in Scotland and the increasing interest in folk and traditional music, which includes the booming popularity of ceilidhs. That there *is* a connection had for some time seemed quite explicit to me. My task, then, has been to try to unravel the nature of this connection. Implicated in this effort has been the need to examine the more general and fundamentally human types of connections anthropologists have long been concerned with: those between artistic performance and politics, those between politics and everyday life, those between sometimes conflicting individual sentiments and social movement, and so on. What is the relationship between the big political dance and the individual dancer?

This thesis will argue that through the performance of folk and traditional music, we can see an example of the everyday creation and expression of national identity in Scotland. Performers use music as a way through which to explore Scotland's histories, present situations, and possibilities for the future; for these performers, the music becomes central in their conceptualisations of Scotland, and of themselves as Scots. In other words, music not only expresses national identity but aids in the shaping of it.

*"Why folk music? Why music at all?"* are questions I have been asked on a number of occasions, usually followed by *"and why in Edinburgh?"* Some anthropologists and local friends alike have pressed even further and asked me why I did not want to go someplace a little bit more out of the way/ exotic/ warm/ *interesting*.

To explain my choice of place, Scotland *is* interesting to me (as it was, then, quite different to the United States I had grown up in), both personally and

academically (although why Scotland over other places, I am not sure). I rapidly came to notice that nearly all of the existing ethnographic literature on Scotland is about rural, coastal villages, fishing communities, Gaelic-speakingcrofting townships, or the bleak, skeletal remains of coal towns in the post-industrial Central Belt. It is an anthropology of peripheries and abandoned centres, an overwhelming concern with *marginality* (Nadel-Klein 1995), although this concern is by no means unique to the anthropology of Scotland. I felt, and still do, that we must equally focus attention upon urban and suburban communities, upon lives that strike us as much with their familiarities as with their differences. It is not, in my mind, a contradiction to study Scottishness(es) and cultural identities in the cosmopolitan centre of Edinburgh; it is simply to look at them from a different perspective.

In a world in which cultural forms, goods and information cross all sorts of borders and boundaries with ever-increasing ease, it becomes the anthropologist's duty to examine the strategies people adopt to maintain local senses of difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Our attention must likewise shift from physical and spatial markers of community, identity and culture (as some sort of coherent entity) to those which arise out of daily practice, interpretation, cultural consumption and production. This shift of perspective has been occurring significantly in the last decade. For example, Clifford (1988), Miller (1987, 1995a, 1995b), Appadurai (1986) and Hannerz (1980, 1992, 1996) have all dealt, both generally and specifically, with these themes. Anthropologists who deal specifically with music have also begun to examine the ways in which local musicians and local musics relate with and respond to international consumption, and cultural blending and

borrowing.<sup>1</sup> These include Barber and Waterman (in Miller 1995), Stokes (1994b), Cohen (1991), and Erlmann (1996). My present work is informed by these examples and aims to position itself within that growing body of literature.

Why music? It seems a particularly curious question to me, although I am one of those people who plots an autobiographical course using musical styles, performers, and pieces as navigational points. Music has always been central in my life; it seemed logical that it should be central in my work. Why, then, Scottish folk music? There is a lot of it in Edinburgh: in pubs, folk clubs, and auditoriums. The friends I made when I arrived here liked it, as I did even before I came. It aroused my imagination and sparked my interest; I found myself wanting to join in the singing, the dancing, the foot-stomping. Most of all, something about the music and the people who performed it or listened to it seemed to say a lot about this country, its thoughts about its past and its ambitions for the future. To listen to Dougie Maclean or Dick Gaughan sing was to hear lengthy arguments about Scottish history, politics and culture summed up beautifully, or harshly, in five or six verses and delivered, unpackaged, to silenced audiences. Furthermore, music-makers the world over are involved, quite self-consciously, in cultural politics and on-going constructions and expressions of cultural similarity, difference and identity; their performances and discourses can provide the anthropologist with tremendously useful routes towards an understanding of these types of processes.

### **Influences and beginnings**

This thesis is sited at the confluence of two major streams of thought. My

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<sup>1</sup> I have tried avoid the rather problematic concept of creolisation: for a critique of recent anthropological employment of the term creolisation, see Mintz (1998), who argues that it has

early academic interests in Scotland were concerned with nationalism, national historiography and the symbolic constructions of national identity. Having read the influential theoretical studies of nationalism by Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), and Smith (1981, 1991), and those more directly concerning Scotland, such as McCrone (1992) and Nairn (1977), it became increasingly apparent that the challenge for the *anthropologist* was to incorporate the stuff of everyday life into a study of nationalism. At the same time, I was spending many of my evenings in folk pubs, eagerly singing along or stamping my feet to the tunes. I was going to ceilidhs and trying to play Scottish tunes on my flute (which I had not played since walking out of the high school marching band at age 16). Beyond my personal enjoyment of the music, I gained a kind of niggling sense that this music could be something important. Re-reading *Imagined communities*, I was spurred on by one of Anderson's more eloquent comments, about national anthems:

No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance. Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Mathilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realisation of the imagined community (1991; 145).

I had felt something similar in the pub a few times, when everyone joined in on the chorus of a well-loved song. Though the singing was confined to the people within the small pub and not transmitted by radio or television across an entire country, Anderson's passage triggered a sense of recognition. At such moments, the pub could be the whole world. Likewise, Handler's important ethnography of Quebecois nationalism (1988) provided methodological ideas about the anthropological investigation of local expressions and constructions of nationalism.

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provided some writers with an excuse to discard categories such as region and community too readily.

The more pub sessions and ceilidhs I attended, the more I became convinced that the folk revival and Scottish calls for self-determination were linked to one another, or at least shared a number of central ideas. The musicians I spoke to regarding my proposed project made encouraging noises. One singer (an outspokenly socialist and nationalist man with a degree in politics) said: "*Of course the music is about our national identity. Its nice to see academia taking an interest.*" This thesis, then, deals with the ways in which the musicians (and a few others) I know engage with nationalistic sentiments of various sorts: their thoughts about Scotland's political future and the position of what they perceive to be its traditions, their ways of remembering its histories and understanding its landscapes. It is not, in other words, an attempt to define what Scottish nationalism is or is not, or to fit these local expressions of nationalism into a pre-existing theoretical model.

The existing academic literature on Scottish folk and traditional music has been useful in a historical and ethnographic sense. Ailie Munro's (1996 [1984]) book *The democratic muse: folk music revival in Scotland*, has been particularly crucial in providing me with a sense of where the roots of the contemporary musical scene lie. The book is not, however, a complete account of the development of the folk scene, in that it largely prioritises *folk singing* and neglects the flowering of instrumental music. Likewise, it does little to contextualise the contemporary folk scene within a larger Scottish cultural and political environment. The writings of Hamish Henderson, commonly and affectionately considered the father of the current Scottish folk revival, have provided sound ethnographic links between the music, the Scottish literary community, and the changing political situation in this country throughout the second half of this century. Most of this literature exists thanks to the

work of the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University, which has been active within the musical scene itself and within the field of folklore studies since its founding in the early fifties. I have never imagined myself as a folklore or song collector, or as a folklorist. Despite their rejection by many contemporary social scientists, I do believe folklore studies are still an important contribution to our understanding of histories; in many ways they supply us (or at least attempt to) with the people's history that is not documented by mainstream historiography. Nevertheless, it has been my firm belief that this work can be situated within a growing body of literature on the anthropology of music.

This has been, then, the second major theoretical influence upon my project. In particular, John Blacking's work, beginning with his book *How musical is man?* (1976) and the works of Martin Stokes (1994), Charles Keil and Steven Feld (1994), Ruth Finnegan (1989), Sara Cohen (1991), Veit Erlmann (1996) and Philip Bohlman (1988) have given me a foundation upon which to base my treatment of music within a social context. Within an anthropological study of music making in Scotland, then, I draw upon notions that have arisen out of music making across the world; although I believe the present situation in Scotland to be in many ways unique (as every social and historical context is unique), I also believe the best way to understand it is to contextualise it within what are, in many ways, global processes.

Unlike an older style of ethnomusicology, which places music itself, as a cultural product, at the core of investigation, the new anthropological approaches focus more upon musical *performance* as a socially and politically embedded activity. Until John Blacking's important work appeared in the mid 1970's, mainstream anthropology had largely neglected music (and to a degree it still does),

although with Blacking I would argue that of all the arts, it is both the most emotionally affective and socially shaping. We can only guess at the reasons for this neglect. I suspect modernist anthropology's concern with structures and relationships (rather than, generally, the social modes through which these structures and relationships are negotiated) partially led to a more widespread neglect of artistic performance. Similarly, music is neither visually observable nor is the experience of it readily verbalisable, and for someone studying music alien to her or his own cultural inheritance, its emotional impact is likely to be lessened (at least at first).

My own flute playing and singing became the major shaping factor in both my experience of the music and in my interaction with other musicians. I am convinced that had I been wholly unfamiliar with Scottish music, uncertain in the language and unable (or unwilling) to actually join in the performance of it, the outcome of my ethnography would have been entirely different. Yet (and here is where theory and method are revealed to be two ends of one tangled string), an ability to participate in music making has allowed me to understand the importance of personal *involvement*. The doing is what connects the art to the person; the sometimes intense physical activity involved in learning a song or a tune or a dance until it is deeply ingrained not just in the conscious mind but in the muscles makes it *ours*. We feel as though it belongs to us and we feel connected to others who also claim it as their own. The body is tremendously important here, in that through performance it becomes the site where cultural practice is made truly real. Through performance, people not only express culture but become it. As Miller writes: "Perhaps the major shortcomings of many theories of the concept of culture is that they identify culture with a set of objects, such as the arts in themselves, rather than



seeing it as an evaluation of the relationship through which objects are regarded as *social forms*”(1987; 11, my emphasis).

The experience of performance is one of the most frequent subjects of discussion within the folk scene, largely because the scene carries a powerful, and highly idealistic, notion that *anyone* can participate in folk music-making. This participation in performance can be standing on a stage or it can be singing along as part of an audience: many musicians like to play down the distinction between performer and audience<sup>2</sup>.

When a cultural form is symbolically connected with the nation in a way as powerful as the music is in Scotland, it is possible to see musical performance as both the shaping and expression of national identity. This argument does not rely upon any concrete definition of national identity or Scottishness, nor does it propose that the people I have met have a unified vision of the nation or of nationalism. At the heart of my theoretical treatment of the nation is Anderson’s notion of the imagined community. Added to that, however, is Cohen’s (1996) idea of personal nationalism, which I believe to be entirely complementary to the imagined community. Drawing attention to the importance of individual agency in the imagining process, he writes: “...I substantiate the otherwise vacuous national level in terms of my own experience, of my reading of history, of my perception of the landscape, of my reading of Scotland’s literature and music, so that when I ‘see’ the nation, I am looking at myself”(1996; 805). Likewise, Barth (1994) instructs us to attend to the experiences that shape the perception of ethnicity, rather than try to objectify the markers of it.

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<sup>2</sup> However, as I will discuss in chapter six, this open-ness tends to exist more as an ideal than it does in reality and thus becomes a source of irritation to many would-be performers.



Likewise, I believe national identity is shaped and expressed just as powerfully through any number of social activities and performances as it is through music. Many people in Scotland hate traditional music and see it to be provincial, backward-looking, and detrimental to an internationalist vision of Scotland. Rather than pretending such views do not exist, people within the music scene find ways of presenting what they do as a vibrant, youthful and optimistic stream of cultural performance.

Like many anthropologists, Harris questions the usefulness of the concept of tradition and how far we can see present practices to be linked to a cultural past (1996; 3). While taking on board the post-modern concern with fluidity and change, she also criticises many post-modernists' quick tendency to reject local claims to links with the past through traditional culture. Calling for the development of a more nuanced use of the concept of tradition, she seizes upon the idea of a "living tradition", which accommodates new developments while maintaining some continuity with older forms and lives (ibid; 12-13). "Living tradition" is a term which many folk musicians, in Scotland and elsewhere, use frequently and there is a Scottish-based folk music magazine entitled *The living tradition*. Grumbling arguments about the loss of authenticity and tradition do exist in the folk scene but reflect, in my experience, individual tastes more than they do general patterns. Rather, for most of the singers and musicians I know, 'tradition' is like plain clay; you mould it, add to it, decorate it, make it into whatever you want. But if you leave it too long, it will dry up and become useless and dead. Whatever the music is (and it is many things to many people), everyone agrees that it should not become a museum-piece.

Certainly, part of what is going on here is a self-conscious process of cultural or ethnic production which is fuelled not necessarily by (N)ationalism (the capital denoting an explicit party-political agenda) *per se* but by national awareness (see also Vermulen and Govers, eds. 1994; Fox, 1990). At some level, this can be seen as an oppositional process as Eriksen (1992) proposes; by defining themselves, through their actions, as Scottish, people can be either consciously or unconsciously also asserting that they are *not* English, *not* Irish (sometimes, although sometimes they can be both Irish and Scottish), *not* Americanised (or Globalised), or whatever else they might not want to be. I would not, however, want to imply that the oppositional factors were dominant in people's minds; largely, I think, they are more concerned with who and what they *are*, in a highly positive and optimistic sense.

In particular, I take issue with the notion that through the performance of "Scottish", or "Celtic" music, these Edinburgh singers and musicians are staking claim to a cultural form that is defunct in its "authentic" or indigenous setting.

Chapman writes:

...in, say, a small Breton village, it is entirely typical that 'traditional Breton music', as played on 'traditional Breton instruments', should be totally absent; it is indeed present, then it is in all probability the province either of intellectual incomers with folkloric tastes, or of some small part of the university educated local youth who might even listen to such music on record-player or tape recorder (or whatever newer technology comes to offer itself. Locally born, full-time residents, and (crucially perhaps) speakers of the local Celtic language, that is, the great majority of local people, often know little or nothing about this music, and have no interest in it. It is not *their* music... (1994; 30).

This passage, and the essay in which it is contained, may contain accurate observations about the specific Breton setting, but Chapman uses them to produce a grand and wholly unproductive generalisation about all "Celtic" music. Chapman ignores the fact that what he calls "Celtic music" differs structurally and occupies a

different place in the local and national communities of each so-called Celtic country. Furthermore, although deconstruction of the myths surrounding the Celtic Fringe has been Chapman's intellectual hobby-horse for years (see also 1979, 1992), it seems that what he has done here is to reify the type of dichotomy he has ostensibly been trying to break down: he has identified a boundary between 'real' Celts and 'would-be' Celts. Real Celts, that is, speakers of a Celtic language, do not like Celtic music and have moved on to more modern or contemporary forms of entertainment. Would-be Celts like it because it suits the particular ethnic guise they have donned for themselves. What I want to suggest is that this type of generalisation is dangerous because it deems as artificial or somehow culturally invalid a vibrant, powerful and increasingly popular art form, and because it allows very little space for performers' own interpretations of their motives and experiences.

### **Cross-roads: cultural themes and political contexts**

I set the 11th of September, 1997 down to be the official end of my fieldwork, though having never left Edinburgh, I've never *really* stopped learning from what is still going on around me. 11 September 1997, a sunny but autumnal Thursday, was the day of the referendum for a Scottish parliament. On that day, Andrew Neil, the editor of *The Scotsman*, wrote in his column:

And what, now, might a nation be? A new century beckons. Generations still to be born will understand themselves by the decision their country makes today. Scotland stands at the threshold armed only with the simple, fundamental gift of democracy: a free people today will make their choice. Are we to affirm our identity on this sea-beaten patch of the planet or shall we deny ourselves once and for good? Is Scotland complete, alive and prepared for what the new millennium brings, or is it merely the name for an episode in history that has almost passed? We know who we have been. Who, and what, do we now choose to become?(11/9/1997).

The referendum was successful, as most people expected it to be. I wasn't sure what to expect on the morning of Friday the 12th: drunken singing and partying in the streets, perhaps fireworks? Would we, as some of the press was almost suggesting, all wake up to a brighter, clearer sky? There were celebrations, of course, but these were relatively small and mostly limited to the groups of political activists who had campaigned so hard for this result. The majority of people I met that day simply went about their daily business with any welling of patriotic sentiment revealing itself in wee head shakes and stoical comments: "*Aye. Some result last night, eh?*" It seemed to me at the time a rather anti-climactic response. Though journalists and politicians alike claimed that this had been the most significant event in Scottish political history in almost three centuries, the people who had brought the event about responded philosophically, reserving judgement I suppose. Some of my friends in the folk scene threw parties. A few wrote songs. For the most part, though, the jury on the Scottish Parliament is still out; the referendum is seen as the beginning of a road rather than the end of one.

Symbolically, the day was a profound one. Practically, its effects have yet to be felt.

On the day after the referendum, Hamish Henderson (a man of many trades: poet, folklorist, active socialist, leading member of the School of Scottish Studies, and translator of the works of Antonio Gramsci) told a reporter from *The Scotsman*:

I was amazed when I went out onto the streets and felt there was something deep below the surface, an incalculable feeling that spoke volumes to me. I am certain that the resurgence of interest in our culture has driven us to this point and I do not concede that there can be any down side. (10/9/1997).

A variety of political and cultural nationalisms have been on the increase in Scotland throughout the century but most significantly from the early to mid 1960's. These were fuelled at first by the widespread political and social discontent which

characterised the sixties, and after 1971 by the imagined economic potential of the North Sea oil industry. Since 1979, the much despised Conservative government in Westminster has further strengthened calls for devolution or independence. With Henderson (among others), though, I believe that the direct calls for political change have also arisen largely out of a cultural renaissance which first made itself apparent in the Scots literary scene of the 1920's and 1930's.

As I will explore in more depth in chapter four, this renaissance saw Scotland's literary and intellectual figures beginning to relocate themselves firmly in Scotland rather than North Britain, making a conscious effort to prioritise Scots and Gaelic languages, and seeking to represent and illuminate the conditions of contemporary (rather than romanticised past) life. Republicanism, of a socialist leaning, was one of the most powerful themes throughout much of the literature from this era; from the literature these sentiments began to creep both into the political world and into the popular imagination. Angus Calder (1994; see also Brand 1978) highlights the importance of the Scottish media, both print and broadcast, in popularising these views and making them accessible to a public audience. "MacDiarmidism", as Calder (*ibid.*) calls this movement (after poet Hugh MacDiarmid, who was its most central and outspoken figure) brought a new sense of self-assertion to all of the Scottish artistic communities, including the increasingly active and popular folk musical one (despite MacDiarmid's own somewhat grumbling declaration that folk songs were the 'ignorant droolings of swinish shepherds' (quoted by *ibid.*; 1).)

This movement was not entirely Nationalist *per se*, although a large number of people within it did actively title themselves as such. It did, however, press the

notion that Scotland, as a socially and culturally distinct entity, did still exist and was justified in claiming a kind of national identity (however diverse). It also inspired a growing popular sense that Scottishness was compatible with a modern, cosmopolitan society and need not entail an exclusionary or provincial definition. When North Sea oil provided an initial suggestion that Scottish independence or home rule could be economically viable, the socio-cultural foundation stones for a more coherent call for political change were settling into place.

The Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major, though by no means *universally* despised in Scotland, were increasingly thought to exemplify a democratic deficit north of the Border. By the time I arrived in Scotland in 1994, it was becoming apparent that to call oneself a Tory was, according to growing popular sentiment (particularly among members of my generation), akin to a denial of Scottishness altogether. Though Scotland's younger generations have not necessarily wholeheartedly embraced nationalism, they have substantially rejected unionism and its implications of, in the minds of many people I know, a conservative British nationalism which seeks to deny any cross-border cultural difference. The Conservatives lost *all* of their Scottish parliamentary seats in the general election of 1 May, 1997 (as they did, also, in Wales).

About ten months before the general election, a friend told me this joke: *A wee lad sees the word devolution in the newspaper his dad is reading. "Daddy," he asks, "what's the difference between evolution and devolution?" The man looks up from his paper and says "Well, devolution takes longer."*

After the landslide rejection of the Tories, the scale of which could only have been fantasised about beforehand, most of the people I know believed devolution

was now inevitable. For some, it was the end they'd long wanted; for others it was simply a step closer to the real aim: independence. Although I don't know anyone who voted against the Parliament, my feeling now is that in order to win anyone's true approval, it will have to prove its worth in terms of the actual, physical governing of Scotland; in other words, it will have to prove itself to be far more than just the *symbol* of democracy it has been in its absence.

### **The thesis**

The following chapters, then, will attempt to unpack the nature of this series of relationships between the folk revival, as an example of the cultural revival more generally, and the political processes. I regard the music to be an example of the ways in which Scottish identity is shaped and expressed, and how this identity then exerts influence upon political power structures. Through this formulation, I attempt to highlight the power of individual sentiment, performance and experience in the shaping of a cultural-political process. Although the majority of characters in this ethnography are musicians and singers, either amateur or professional, I will occasionally include reference to people who are not part of the folk scene in order to further illustrate or contextualise particular discussions.

Chapter two will serve as an account of my methodology and a discussion about the implications and benefits of the participatory approach to anthropological investigation. In chapter three, I will provide a brief background to my own work in Edinburgh and will give a brief ethnographic introduction to the city. Here, also, I will describe some of the various types of folk musical performance in the city in order to introduce the reader to the context.



In the next chapter, I will provide a historical outline of the rise of Scottish nationalism in the twentieth century and will link this in with the literary and cultural revivals. I will also provide a brief history of the folk revival more specifically, linking what has happened in Scotland with both the political processes here and musical and political influences from outside Scotland, particularly from the United States and Ireland.

Chapter five will place the folk revival within a contemporary Scottish popular cultural realm. Having given some initial background about popular culture theory, I then will draw out some of the themes that can be identified within various Scottish popular cultural forms, including literature and mass media as well as folk music. The changing portrayals of Scottishness and Scottish culture in the media in the months on either side of the political events of 1997 will also be examined. In recent years, folk musical performance in Scotland has moved away from being overtly political or associating itself with particular causes. Instead, there is a growing confidence and interest in local cultural forms and this interest is, in itself, both politically motivated and politically charged.

In chapter six, I move on to look at the ways in which musical performance shapes individual constructions of identity, particularly through embodied, emotional experience. I discuss the ways in which music-making should be seen to be part of the everyday lives of the people involved and the way this musical performance acts to create, in their minds, a sense of community. Music, in other words, draws people together. It also, however, creates divisions and hierarchies. I will thus examine the dominant ethos of egalitarianism in the folk scene and the ways in which it often fails to manifest itself in practice.



Chapter seven deals with the ways in which folk-song, specifically, is used in order to create social memory. Social memory in terms of a Scottish class history and in terms of a gendered history will be the two main focal points, and I will look at the ways people seek to invest some kind of meaning in or create some kind of personal relationship with those histories. I argue from the perspective that the history which matters to people is not a “fixed” series of events but rather a personal and social process of reconstruction of a combination of “real” events and somewhat more mythical or imagined ones. In this respect, social memory tells us more about current life and conditions than it necessarily does about past ones.

Finally, chapter eight looks at the role place and landscape occupy within folk musical performance. A connection with the land or with particular locations is a common theme in much Scottish (and Irish) folk music, both song and instrumental. Often, this connection arises out of what might be called nostalgia, generally for places left behind. Immigration/emigration (or internal migration) are central in much social memory, and folk musical performance can be seen as a way in which people attempt to ground or localise their senses of identity or to reclaim a sense of belonging to particular places.

### **Setting the tempo: some language and terms explained**

I wish to create as realistic a portrait of the folk scene and its social and political positions as possible. Of course, people may or may not always agree with my interpretations of what they do; it is always possible that somebody will say to me “Well, I just like the music, that’s all.” As a *participant*, I am not entirely at ease with the anthropologist’s self-assigned task of going beyond such an explanation; as

an anthropologist, the question “Why?” cannot let me rest there.

Continually frustrated with academic writing in which human beings are drowned in the tides of jargon, I have tried, as far as possible, to prevent this thesis from lapsing into the dry and soul-less tongue of academia. The effort has been to merge ethnographic and analytic passages without major stylistic transitions; I try to paint a picture through these pages, to capture the scenes as I have experienced them and to communicate my sense of why they matter. To quote Alan Campbell, who said much the same thing nearly ten years ago: “I am going to put together some anecdotes (a word that originally meant ‘things unpublished’) and I hope that they are found to be of deeper implication than the more relaxed, informal kind of traveller’s tales” (1989; 12).

I should explain my use of a few particular terms here before continuing into the body of the thesis. Throughout, I use the words “folk” and “traditional” music in the way the musicians and singers I know use them. Folk music is generally a catch-all term referring to both song and instrumental music which may be either old or ‘traditional’ or contemporary. It includes a range of styles from Scotland, Ireland, North America, England, and many other places, and does not have any strict stylistic implications, apart from a prioritisation of acoustic over electrified music. In many cases, folk blurs with blues, jazz, and pop. There is perhaps a stricter division between folk and “classical” or “art” music, which emphasises professionally trained performers and a rigid distinction between performer and audience. Again, however, I would not wish to imply that there was an impermeable boundary here either. It would be inaccurate to categorise folk music as “low” culture or “folk” culture as strictly opposed to “high” or “art” culture. In Scotland,

music has long crossed such boundaries with relative frequency, and, to use Hamish Henderson's description, a sort of "friendly communal cannibalism" (1992; 305) has existed between "literary" poets and "folk" poets, between writers and singers, and between "art" musicians and "folk" or "traditional" ones.

There is a powerful notion in the folk scene that this is music of "the people", although there is no rigid definition of who "the people" are, as there was in the days of the post-Victorian folk revival which will be discussed in chapter three. Yet, most singers and musicians agree that this music should be somewhat contextualised within a social history. As Munro (1996; 2) points out, the International Folk Music Council attempted to define folk music in 1954 but was unsuccessful and people generally recognise that any rigid definition would be impossible. My sense is that rather than defining folk music stylistically, people define it more contextually; a song performed by one person in one context could be a pop song. Sung elsewhere by someone else, it could be a folk song.

"Traditional music" is used more specifically in reference to instrumental music played on instruments such as the fiddle, accordion, flute, whistle, mandolin and sometimes pipes, among various others. It is played on its own in pub sessions or concerts or can be used to accompany song or dancing. When speaking of traditional music, people tend, in Scotland, to be referring to both Scottish and Irish music, although sometimes a distinction is made; likewise, little distinction is made between "traditional" tunes which have been written anonymously sometime in the past and those which have been written in the 'traditional style' more recently. Instead of asking each other "who wrote that tune", people will generally ask other performers "where did you get that tune?" Sometimes, people use the word Celtic

interchangeably with “traditional”, although it is recognised that the label Celtic is a constructed generalisation which refers to what is really a geographically and stylistically diverse collection of musical traditions.

People will often refer to “traditional” song, distinguished from folk song more generally. Here they tend to refer to specific forms of song such as the Scots ballad or Gaelic waulking songs, or to songs whose origins are uncertain. A singer will generally specify who the author of a given song was, or will call it traditional. Songs known to be written by past writers, most notably Robert Burns, are sometimes described as traditional but not always. Burns is very often is put into a category of his own. Like traditional instrumental tunes, traditional songs are often known in Irish and Scottish versions and sometimes in North American manifestations as well. Again, people sometimes specify. Within the folk scene, people invest varying degrees of interest in origins and differing version of songs and tunes. What they do not often do, however, is rank these versions according to which is more “authentic”. Some people will refer to the so-called authenticity of contexts, again, but I rarely encountered this word in reference to particular pieces of music or stylistic peculiarities.

This having been said, however, while people do not often like to specify exactly what folk music *is*, they are generally fairly adamant about asserting their various ideas about what it is not. It is not the dance hall accordions of Jimmy Shand and his Band, Sir Harry Lauder, or sentimental renditions of “Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond”, for example. It is not massed pipe bands or country-dance societies. “*Parochial*”, writes Cairns Craig, “the word has haunted discussion of Scottish culture; it damns us before we start because we must leap in desperation to join ‘the

world'; condemns us when we finish with having been no more than ourselves"(1996; 11). Although performers like Jimmy Shand have achieved a commercially popular status in Scotland that most folk musicians can only dream of, the folk scene works hard to distance itself from such tartan clad icons. Accusations of parochialism must be confronted and nipped in the bud at all costs. Most of the singers and instrumentalists I know are highly disapproving of the "Scottish music" marketed to tourists in the shops of the Royal Mile and claim no affiliation with it whatsoever. They are embarrassed by it. Much nationalist-oriented academic or journalistic writing in Scotland has embraced the type of argument familiarised by *The Invention of tradition*, and particularly by Trevor-Roper's essay within it (1983), condemning these forms as illegitimate and romantic products of the Victorian imagination. However, many more contemporary Scottish writings justly condemn Trevor-Roper's analysis to be simplistic and his history to be inaccurate (see McCrone 1992, for example). Much of the contemporary folk musical community attacks Victorian romanticism and twentieth century parochialism equally vehemently and is eager to claim that what it does is more culturally meaningful or legitimate, if not authentic. The aesthetic rules which distinguish tartanry and sentimentality from "legitimate" folk music are politically determined: one is seen to be parochial and the other is cultural. I have gained a very strong sense that the folk scene sees itself as having something of a duty to correct the world's vision of what Scottish culture is and isn't; it wants to be seen as at once worldly and uniquely Scottish. However, I have also gained a sense that some performers are seeking to reclaim these images and are using them in order to imbue their music and public images with a generous helping of irony.

I should make one final note here. For the sake of convenience, I speak throughout of the “folk scene” in Edinburgh. Again, I do this in much the same way the singers and musicians do. However, readers should not assume that this “scene” is internally homogeneous or entirely harmonious. There are notable internal divisions, perhaps most visibly between singers and instrumentalists, and a wide range of political opinions, backgrounds, ambitions, and agendas. I believe that the music does, in many ways, have the power to create something resembling a community and that people who participate in it see themselves as part of that community. Like any community, however, it is comprised of individuals. For every generalisation I make here, there are exceptions; one can never escape the ifs and buts. Although anthropological or sociological writing depends upon generalisations, I will try to convey as many of the complexities and contradictions as I can here.

## **II: Methods: doing music**

*“Anthropology?” he said, shaking my hand after I’d introduced myself, “Shouldn’t you be in the jungle somewhere? Anyway, never mind. What are you going to sing for us?”*

My fieldnotes

It is now well recognised in social anthropology that ethnographic description and analysis are inseparable, perhaps even largely indistinguishable. It has also become clear that research locale, focus and methodologies are also implicated not just in the material to which we gain access but in the understandings we reach about that material. It is always the case that our material and interpretations are highly influenced by the ways in which we have gathered that material and by the relationships we have had with the other people involved in our research. This chapter gives an account of *what* I did, why I carried out the research in this particular, and perhaps unusual, manner and how that research has influenced the rest of what is written in this thesis.

### **Getting started and getting involved**

I did a period of participant-observation in Edinburgh between the end of July, 1996 and the middle of September, 1997, beginning nearly two years after first arriving in Edinburgh to begin first an M.Sc. and then a Ph.D. in social anthropology. I knew my way round Edinburgh by that time, geographically at least, and having been an eager fan of folk music since my arrival, had a small number of contacts within the scene and some ideas about how to begin. I had envisioned my research to

be primarily based round interviews with performers, and set about seeking people to question.

However, finding performers with the time or desire to be interviewed in the midst of the Festival madness (during which Edinburgh-based musicians are either busy with gigs or taking well-timed holidays), began to seem a difficult and daunting prospect. One of my friends, a young woman who is an accomplished Scots fiddler and music teacher, discouraged me from the interview approach and repeatedly insisted that in order to understand the experience and position of music-makers, I had to participate in making music myself. Knowing that I was a relatively competent flute player (though I had hardly touched the instrument in ten years), she encouraged me to learn some tunes (as Scots and Irish musicians refer, broadly, to the jigs, reels, strathspeys, and other short pieces of music played in pub sessions or for dancing) and join in. Get involved, she and others kept telling me. Just do it.

Taking her advice, I took my flute out of the case, bought a few books of tunes, and began to play. While the Festival continued, I sat in on sessions, though did not play, and spent time observing the interactions between the regular Edinburgh performers and the tourists who flocked to hear their “traditional Scottish” music (much of which was, in actuality, Irish). I went to hear pub singers, generally solo male singer/guitarists who tend to stick to a fairly standard Scottish, Irish and American repertoire, and began to form some initial observations about the differing types of performance, venue, and interaction between performer and audience. I kept an ear out for reference, also, to the political situation in Scotland and tried to rigorously follow the newspapers and broadcasts on BBC Radio Scotland for



discussions of national politics and national identity. I also attended as many relevant Festival and Fringe events as I felt I could afford.

Although the Festival has in the past been much criticised for prioritising “élite” cultural forms over local folk or traditional ones, this has in some ways begun to change as Scottish music, literature, and drama have become increasingly popular and influential. I rapidly began to realise that the Festival provides a perfect stage for a huge amount of both subtle and highly visible or audible cultural politicking. Official performers are not the only ones who put themselves on display; so too do the crowds who arrive to watch and soak up the atmosphere. For me, it made for excellent people-watching. I wrote in my fieldnotes of 19 August, 1996:

*Edinburgh is manic right now. Ordinary life is difficult and I don't know how anyone manages to carry on a normal, working schedule in the midst of all this traffic. The streets are so full they're literally heaving. The celebrations and shows carry on around the clock and many pubs are open until 3, and some until 5 am. This past weekend they closed off the Royal Mile to cars and had bands playing, street performers, and huge cinema screens in the courtyard of the city chambers. I went up with Sophie, Paul and Christine and we were watching people because we'd missed the films. We met a couple friends of Paul's, who sat down with us. There were thousands of people sitting at the tables that had been put out or walking up and down the street. There was a group of young English kids--about 18 or 19 years old, I think--well dressed, trendy types, sitting at the table next to us. They were shouting abuse at everyone who walked by.*

*As one group of Spanish or Italian tourists walked by, they started yelling "Fuck off! Get out of our country! We have to live in this country!"*

*And then at a bunch of Scottish men in kilts, one of them--a girl--yelled "Fucking Jocks! Who do you think you are?" The Scotsmen either ignored them or, more likely, didn't hear them. Paul's friend leaned in and said quietly, to us and not to them "It's not your country either, ya bitch."*

I remember being surprised at these teenagers' verbal violence in what was otherwise a jolly and peaceful crowd; I also remember an almost tangible change of mood at our table, from laughing to quietly aggressive, in response. This sort of

exchange is not, I would guess, a regular occurrence during Festival, but it seemed to provide an example of the types of sentiment the huge and diverse crowds can induce. For me, that Festival provided more information than I could write down or take in. What it did do very well was pose questions.

The sensory barrage ends in early September, and almost immediately the numbers of tourists drop off and the city calms down again. The end of the Festival marks the end of the summer too; not long after this, the air becomes cooler and the trees begin to change colour. It is a time for getting back down to the business of work, school, and the patterns of everyday life. Many of my friends tell me the time between the end of Festival and the arrival of the students at the start of October is their favourite time of year here. I enrolled in two weekly Scots music groups, one instrumental and one for women singers, offered by an Edinburgh community education scheme called the Adult Learning Project. ALP, as its members call it, takes an active role in the promotion of Scottish cultural and artistic forms, particularly music, and many of its members are active within folk musical circles in Edinburgh. I used my involvement in the groups as a chance to meet both the established performers who lead the groups and other people who, like myself, were learning the music and wanting to become involved. As a highly successful urban community education scheme, run largely by its own participants according to an overtly culturally nationalist agenda, ALP itself would make a fascinating ethnographic study in itself. For me though, it was a perfect inlet into the musical scene. Almost immediately I began to meet people who both welcomed me into sessions and registered an interest in my project (though after the first few weeks, I

suspect many of them forgot I was there as an anthropologist as well as a participant).

I remained in the ALP groups until they broke up again for the following summer holiday and went back to them the following term, after my fieldwork period was officially over. Also during the academic year of 1996-1997, I took a Gaelic language class offered by Edinburgh University's Continuing Education program. In the long run, the Gaelic became something of a tangential issue in my work, but it did provide a useful opportunity to meet people and hear their reasons for wanting to learn Gaelic. As might be expected, I encountered many people who crossed over between Gaelic circles and folk musical ones, as these two forms are central to a Scottish cultural revival more generally.<sup>1</sup>

The most valuable times during the year were the two or three nights a week I spent singing or playing in sessions. Here is where many of my most worthwhile insights have arisen, and here is where the most useful and relevant conversations have taken place with other players. These conversations often happened across session tables strewn with instruments and pint glasses, and our words were accompanied by strums of the guitar, the rhythmic stomp of feet, and the smell of smoke and beer.

I came to understand that this context, and the relationships between people within it, is as valuable and important as the music itself. For this reason, I prioritised the public, recreational spaces where music is performed and rarely followed people to their homes and never to their non-musical workplaces. Instead

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent ethnographic and analytical account of the Gaelic revival, particularly on the Isle of Skye, see Sharon Macdonald's 1997 book *Reimagining culture*.

of treating people's musical activities as somehow tangential to their "normal" daily life, I treated them as central to it (as suggested by Finnegan 1989). Likewise, many conversations begun in one pub on a Monday night would continue, with the same person, in a different pub in a Tuesday or Wednesday night, and often they would be inspired by a particular piece of music. A song might suggest questions to me or inspire people to offer tidbits of information. Generally the unsolicited information was far more useful than that given in response to my queries because in many cases the answers were tremendously difficult for people to put into words. I began to feel it important to engage with musicians on their terms instead of trying to push our meetings in unnatural directions in order to extract information; slowly I began to relax into the gentle flow and rhythm of the musical evenings.

The population of the folk scene in Edinburgh is somewhat fluid. Although there are people who have been present and known here for years, the scene attracts a much larger temporary or occasional membership that would be impossible to measure numerically. As many researchers in urban settings find, there were many people I met only once or twice throughout the year and others I only encountered at particular types of events, such as ceilidhs. There is a core group of roughly thirty men and women with whom I had more contact and some of whom I came to regard as close friends. These are people who I met repeatedly in music groups or at sessions, and who later invited me to parties or sessions at their flats. I have been particularly influenced by the time spent with them and this thesis owes a great debt to the sentiments and knowledge they have both wittingly and unwittingly imparted to me.

Often, however, I would have productive conversations with people I only met once, and so do not have a sense of how their opinions and representations of themselves changed according to context or over time. Many people I met frequently contradicted themselves in discussions of issues such as politics or history, depending upon who was listening or upon whom they hoped to make an impression; frequently they contradicted their own answers to questions I had asked them on previous meetings. Furthermore, although some people would consistently give the same verbal accounts of their views, I would occasionally observe them acting in ways which contradicted or conflicted with these views.

This self-contradiction, which we all do to some degree at times, combined with my (and others') sense that the significant emotional experience of music is tremendously difficult to verbalise, meant that the structured interviews I had envisioned to be a large part of my fieldwork did not happen. I carried out four of what I intended to be structured interviews with people, meeting in them in cafes with a sheet of questions. However, these questions were rapidly left by the wayside as conversation ranged onto topics they felt to be more relevant. Concrete biographical information was really all I felt confident in obtaining through direct questioning and thus the majority of my verbal interactions with people took place in the form either of casual conversation or very unstructured interviews.

Often, people imparted their political views with qualifications such as *"Well, I suppose I'm a nationalist in many ways, but I wouldn't want to be labelled as a nationalist,"* or even *"but I wouldn't want my boss to know how I vote."* I try to balance what people have said to me with my observations on how these sentiments

may or may not be manifested in practice. For this reason, and because there were several dozen people I met briefly throughout the year whose names I never knew (as I will discuss later, individuals become known largely by the instrument they play or the type of song they sing and often names seem less important markers of identity), many of the names I use in this thesis will represent composite characters.

Well known professional performers will be mentioned by name, although they are not the main characters of this ethnography. I did meet a number of well known artists but these meetings were brief and hurried, often just before or after a gig. The majority of people I met are amateur or semi-professional singers or instrumentalists of various ages; they are people who work in part or full time jobs (or are students) in a variety of non-musical fields and for whom the music is their main recreational activity. Some of them have professional aspirations and would like to “make it” in the music scene, some of them have actually recorded or do perform live frequently or from time to time in a variety of venues, and others want to keep the music as a hobby and do not want to complicate their enjoyment of it with the difficulties of making a living.

Far from regarding the amateur performers (which should be taken as non-money making rather than second rate) as less important or central to the folk scene than the professionals, I see them as the real “folk”: the ordinary people for whom the music is not a financial means of existence but something that supplements and in large part shapes their everyday lives. These are the people who ensure that musical performance is not entirely the realm of highly specialised professionals but rather something in which “the folk” (in whatever guise) can participate. Both consumers

and creators of music, these are often people who have spent years listening to folk music and have decided to learn an instrument and finally get involved or are people who were classically trained before turning to folk music. Certainly, most people I encountered felt that one could not be truly involved in the folk scene without performing in some way. Although there are some well-known figures in the folk musical scene who neither sing nor play, the majority of people one meets both listen and perform (or, at any rate, aspire to perform).

I divided my time fairly evenly between singing and instrumental circles. They are both considered to be equally “folk” but in many ways singing and instrumental performance are two quite different halves of the overall scene. Although there is a good deal of overlap in terms of appreciation, only a few performers actually do both. Guitarists have perhaps the easiest time transcending the divide, but even so, the guitar skills required for accompanying singing and playing instrumental tunes are fairly different. Most, though by no means all, singers have at least a basic ability to play guitar and some are very skilled. However, to accompany instrumental tunes requires a more advanced ability to play in a variety of keys and tunings without the aid of a capo and better improvisational skills and technique than simple song accompaniment demands. Some singers play other instruments such as the banjo, mandolin or bouzouki, but these are less common than the guitar.

On the other hand, I met few instrumentalists who ever sing, even occasionally. In fact, while many singers will happily sit and listen to instrumental performances and are knowledgeable about the music, I met a good number of



instrumentalists who know little about song and do not necessarily like listening to it. Most pub sessions in Edinburgh are either singing or instrumental, although in recent months two or three mixed ones have started up. Although many people refer to sessions in “the old days” (a non-specific time) or in parts of Ireland as being traditionally a mixture of singing and instrumental, there does not tend to be a free mixture here. Singers often complain that the sometimes unrelenting succession of high-speed jigs and reels does not allow room for the voice, and instrumentalists get impatient with sitting quietly while individual singers demand attention. Singing and instrumental sessions also make different requirements upon their audiences; instrumental sessions often become something like background music to which other patrons of the pub may or may not actively listen. Singers on the other hand, often tend to ask their audiences to keep their voices down. Most singing sessions tend to take place in quieter pubs than do instrumental ones and, probably due to the different demands they make upon the listener, tend to attract a different kind of audience.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, sessions vary widely, both in terms of material performed and who attends. In the city-centre pubs, instrumental sessions predominate and the calibre of musician tends to be very high indeed. Although these sessions maintain the aura of casual spontaneity and openness, they do not always live up to this impression. Newcomers are not always welcomed and, though they might not be turned away from the table, they often spend months sitting at the periphery and playing along quietly before being admitted into the session properly.



Established session players, who may be paid by the pub to lead a weekly session, tend to object to newcomers invading their sessions.

There are less well-known instrumental sessions in pubs away from the city centre, and these tend to be more open to players of a mixed range of abilities. These are more accessible to the amateur or occasional player and are the ones in which I participated. Although I have played the flute since childhood, my inexperience with Celtic music prevented me from participating in the prestigious sessions. I spent many days trying to learn tunes, but after a year my repertoire was only a tiny fraction of that of most of the instrumentalists I've met. It is said that a highly experienced musician can play all day and never look at a sheet of music or repeat a tune.

In the beginning, then, I found the singing sessions more accessible. Although singing was at the forefront of the revival of the fifties and sixties, it has in recent years been pushed to the side by the popularity of instrumental music. These sessions tend, therefore, to be quieter and a little less competitive. Singers tend to be more eagerly welcoming of newcomers, sometimes to the point where innocent bystanders are encouraged to sing amidst much goading and laughter. While instrumentalists tend not to spend a large amount of time discussing the tunes they play, singers speak more of the song's content, where it came from, where they learned which versions, and so on. Conversation and storytelling are central aspects of singing sessions and thus for me, they were an ideal way both in which to meet people and to gain some early understanding of the ways people relate to the music they perform.

It was in singing sessions too that I first found myself pressured into performing by the others round the table. Upon first appearing at one particular session, which became a weekly favourite, I introduced myself to the others and explained briefly that I was an anthropology postgraduate interested in Scottish nationalism and its connections with the folk scene. People seemed interested to a degree in my academic position, but far more so in encouraging me to give them a song. As sudden panic caused any song I might have known in entirety to evaporate entirely from my mind, I asked if it was okay if I simply sat and listened in. "*Ach well,*" said one man, "*nae pressure. You can sing next week.*" As time went by, I came to both enjoy my own singing and playing efforts and to understand the methodological importance of this heavily participatory experience.

When I was not playing, I spent time listening to sessions and speaking to other listeners. I frequented the two folk clubs, though not every week, went to occasional larger concerts, and to ceilidhs on weekends. I also took part in several weekend workshops which gave me some introduction to less accessible aspects of Scottish music such as Gaelic *puirt a beul* or "mouth music", which is song to accompany dancing. I spent an intense ten days at the Edinburgh folk festival at the end of March, and travelled out of Edinburgh to the fortnight-long Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow in January and to smaller weekend festivals in Melrose and Auchtermuchty. There were other single events I took part in as well, such as the ceilidh organised as a fund-raiser for the Isle of Eigg appeal, in which the islanders of Eigg were attempting to buy the island from the absentee landlord.

The political events surrounding the general election of 1 May, 1997 and the referendum on the Scottish Parliament of 11 September, 1997 have framed my fieldwork and were always the subjects of much discussion, debate, hope, and anxiety among the people I spent time with. The music and songs are not products of a sweeping political movement, nor should they be regarded as such. However, they provided me with a powerful reflection of the ways in which many people think about Scotland's contemporary political history; I saw them used both as a channel for the communication of ideas and a means through which people sought to shape others' thinking on particular topics. The political situation did not necessarily alter people's political sentiments but it did heighten awareness of issues and bring a gamut of emotion and sometimes vitriol to the surface. The musicians and singers constantly referred back to contemporary and past events, and I shall do likewise in this thesis. Needless to say, then, I spent a great deal of time watching these events unfold and my friends' reactions to them. I also attended events of a more overtly political nature, such as the public display surrounding the return of the Stone of Destiny.

One final issue, which most ethnographers avoid entirely, should perhaps be mentioned at the end of this section: money. Money limits the extent to which people can be involved in the musical scene, and it limited the possibilities for my fieldwork. Prior to beginning research, I had considered spending some time in Ireland or perhaps other parts of Scotland in order to gain some perspective on what was happening in Edinburgh. Nearly my entire Ph.D. has been funded by student loans from the United States, and these, which average about £5,000 per year, do not

extend to cover research costs above and beyond tuition fees and the cost of living in a relatively expensive city such as Edinburgh. Fieldwork-related travel thus became an impossibility. Likewise, I could not have afforded to pay a research assistant to help me with any quantitative research I might have liked to pursue and thus my research methods were confined to what I could physically do myself in the space of just over a year. Ultimately then, the lack of funding becomes a methodological issue; fieldwork is no longer necessarily about seeking that ideal prolonged immersion in the lives of others, no matter the cost, but about doing as much as one can on a tight budget.

### **Being part of the field: the participatory approach**

As I have indicated, I had envisioned a heavily interview-based research project. In the early stages of the fieldwork, however, I began to realise that the sorts of information I wanted would not be easily obtained in such a manner. Because I was interested in the individual and social *experiences* of music, and of national culture, I encountered immediate difficulties with direct questioning. Often, I didn't know what questions to ask, and when I did, people tended to shrug their shoulders or scratch their chins and say "*Och, well, I don't know,*" or "*Well, you know.*" Some people wondered why I wanted *their* opinions and referred me back to books written by members of the School of Scottish Studies or other academic figures.

The most helpful suggestion was, as I have said, to just get involved in the music myself. My own musical abilities, such as they were, became the best "way in" I could have hoped for. They allowed me to participate in the emotional

experiences of making music and being immersed in it: experiences which most musicians hold to be absolutely central. Secondly, my participation in musical events served, in many respects, to place me on a more or less equal stage to that occupied by the subjects of this work. Rather than being entirely an outsider, whose participation in the field is a tool that aids more thorough observation, I quite quickly became a participant who sometimes asked questions and made observations (as many other folklorist/performers have done before me)<sup>2</sup>. In retrospect, having been participating in folk musical performance for nearly three years, and having had a year and a half in which to formulate my interpretations, I now have a better idea of the questions I might have asked during fieldwork.

My own participation, then, gave rise to my more theoretical interests in cultural performance more generally, and these will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter six. I argue, following from, among others, Fabian (1990), Erlmann (1996) and Keil and Feld (1994), that culture must not be seen as anything other than an ever-unfolding process which is realised through practice and performance. Social performance, be it artistic or otherwise, is seen as politically laden in many ways and politics, in turn, are seen to penetrate everyday life not only at the professional and economic levels but also at the recreational and aesthetic ones. Implicit in this argument is the idea that the individual mind and body are sites where culture becomes real and meaningful. Musicians talk about getting *inside* tunes or songs,

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<sup>2</sup> I am still a participant and intend to remain so. The participant/non-participant dichotomy, although not as straightforward as it may seem, is still simpler than that between insiders and outsiders. Although the Edinburgh folk scene is cosmopolitan and contains performers from around the world, it is questionable whether non-Scots are ever entirely accepted as insiders in the *Scottish* folk musical scene as a whole. This may be particularly the case for singers, where the discourses about singing in “one’s own language” come to the fore. I shall further discuss this matter in chapter five.

about reaching a point where one no longer has to think about what comes next and the music seems to reside more in the subconscious than conscious mind. In anthropological terms, the music is embodied as much as it is learned.

Just as we try to get inside a culture through fieldwork (or rather, reach a point where we can, as Clifford (1988) says, find a balance between inside and outside perspectives), I found it necessary to know what it meant to get inside that music. Charles Keil writes that active participation in the making of music is essential to the anthropological understanding of its performance:

In order to understand what any musician is doing, you have to have done some of it yourself. I used to think that you could do it just through listening, but that alone won't let you connect to the music or to other people. All the listening in the world does not condition your mind-body to *be* musical...unless you physically do it, its not really apprehensible, and you're not hearing all there is to hear inside the music. *You're not entering it* (1994; 30. My emphasis).

This is not to say that by participating in music-making, I am experiencing and understanding the music exactly as other musicians do, because I have no way of knowing this for certain. What the participation gives me is a common platform upon which to base a mutually-coherent conversation. My time spent trying to learn and internalise songs and tunes has felt in many ways akin to other anthropologists' efforts to learn the local language; it has been like a process of becoming fluent in a particular form of communication. As Hastrup says of ethnographic research in general: "...the learning of particular performance techniques represents a kind of explicit socialisation, or acculturation, namely the internalisation of a new set of rules for action" (1995; 78).

Likewise, although I would argue that one can come to an understanding about music without actually performing it, such an understanding will always be fundamentally different from those of performers. Although I believe I could have carried out fruitful fieldwork without actually getting involved in music making myself, I am certain that the end product would have been a substantially different thesis to this.

Furthermore, my own participation in music has led to an evolution in the nature of the material I have considered to be *data*. Just as my own questions were often triggered by particular pieces of music, so too were others' verbalisations of both overt political opinions and more subtle understandings of musical material and performance. A song concerning a particular historical episode, sung at a session, could spark enlightening one-line comments or rambling group conversations about Scottish history and politics. At first, my ears always pricked when I heard political statements and opinions and these would be duly noted down.

Later, I began to understand the importance of the individual body in performance of the music, and in the creation of culture that occurs through that performance. I began to pay more attention to dress, body language, physical techniques of both singing and instrumental playing, the use of language and the ways in which people select and introduce material for specific audiences. As Goffman reminds us (1959), these aspects are as much part of the overall performance as is the music itself. In other words, I began to move away from a sole focus upon verbal (or literary and musical textual) data to that which underlies, and reinforces or, sometimes, contradicts it.



As Finnegan (1998; 7) says of the analysis of any kind of narrative, attention must be given not only to the content of the story but also to the context and manner of its telling. I have tried, in this thesis, to weave casual statements, answers to questions, physical activities and presentation, and of course the music itself into a coherent whole. Needless to say, the analyses of these various types of data are products of both my friends' and my own interpretations and should not be read as objective facts.

Just as this research is concerned with the experiences of music-making, the ethnography occupies the spaces in which most of this music is made. These are, in the majority of cases, public spaces. When I do refer to people making music at home, it is in the context of a party, in which the house temporarily becomes a semi-public sphere.

Urban lives are, often, less subject to neighbourly or familiar scrutiny than those within the communities more traditionally chosen by anthropologists; relationships are formed in different (though frequently overlapping) social realms, including work, leisure and residence. Thus the urban context of my work to some extent guided me into, though by no means determined, the focus upon public activities. It should be made explicit, then, that the focus of this research is not upon the intimate details of musicians' lives outside of their musical activities. I have not had access to, in Cohen's terms, the "whole person" (1993; 251), though it is, of course, questionable whether the anthropologist can *ever* have access to the whole person.



I have not, for example, observed domestic routines, traced family trees or participated in births, marriages and deaths. I have not noted down what anybody eats for breakfast or watches on television. I came to learn personal details from people I got to know best, but have chosen to exclude most of these from this thesis, largely because they are not necessarily relevant to the ways people interact within the musical settings. Certainly, personal lives infringe upon musical activities and visa versa, but one notable feature of the folk musical circles is how *little* musicians tend to know about each others' non-musical lives.

My encounters with the people mentioned here have taken place at the cross-roads of the more public sides of our lives and thus my ethnography deals, in most cases, with those aspects of individual experience and identity that are revealed through musical performances and their immediate social contexts. People sometimes speak of the differences between their working and musical incarnations in an almost Jekyll and Hyde fashion, and sometimes say they find it somewhat odd or uncomfortable when their friends from both places mix. It is as if these music-making sessions allow people to move into different social realms to those in which they move at work or at home and to thus become, as it were, *different* people.

At the same time, however (and herein lies the crux of the matter), people frequently stress the centrality of the position these musical activities come to occupy in their daily lives and senses of personal identity (see also Finnegan 1989). This centrality is evidenced in the stories they tell about their own and others' performances, efforts to learn instruments, drunken exploits at festivals, and by the sheer enthusiasm with which they discuss the music itself. Although music is

different than the rest of daily life, it is also *part of* daily life and, importantly, fundamental to the ways in which many people I know construct their senses and representations of who they are. As playing and singing gradually crept in to fill the quieter spaces in my own daily routines, I came to understand this too. It is for this reason, then, that I give music and musical performance my full attention in this thesis, rather than simply treating it as something more or less tangential to the lives of the people I know.

These musical performances take place in a variety of public venues in the centre of Edinburgh or slightly more peripheral districts. The following chapter will locate the thesis geographically within the city and will then provide ethnographic sketches of the various types of performance.

### **III. Edinburgh: musical and otherwise**

This chapter will set the scene in a largely ethnographic manner. The first section is concerned with Edinburgh itself, as a city in the midst of profound political (and thus social and architectural) change and as a fieldwork site. The second will consist of descriptions of the types of musical performance that occur in the Edinburgh folk scene, and of some of the people one meets. Any analysis will be, largely, implied through these descriptions rather than explicitly developed, and many of the themes that begin to arise here will be examined more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

#### **Post-modernist realisations in Auld Reekie**

From Moray McLaren, 1945: *A trifle unnecessary* (a short story):

When I entered the Close from the High Street and saw the reformation that had been achieved, I was compelled, perhaps a little reluctantly, to admit that Roy had done an effective job. The old scarred and peeling walls had been stripped and cleaned, and were now attractively white-harled. The outside of the stairs had been mended or tastefully rebuilt. The original line of the rooftops against the sky to the North had been carefully preserved...There was only one thing that remained unalterably the same-- the smell, that peculiar rancid, sweet sour smell of an Edinburgh close...

"I've seen MacGregor's Close. You've done an extraordinarily good job there, Roy. Honestly you have..."

"Yes, we took a good deal of trouble over that. I think we succeeded. We cleaned it right up, but we managed to preserve everything essential from the old place."

"Including the essential smell."

"Oh, you noticed that, did you? Its a nuisance, but we can't do anything about it. The architect thinks its something to do with the earth underneath."

"I confess to a slight feeling of relief that even you can't change the quality of the earth."

Roy smiled his wintry smile, but said nothing; so I went on: "And there are other things that remain there too. I met an astonishing old woman who sells shoe-laces and matches at the corner of the Close."

Roy shook his head disapprovingly. "Yes, we didn't like to clear off all the old people all at once. But they'll soon die off" (reprinted in O.D. Edwards and G. Richards 1983; 258-65).

Visitors or newcomers to Edinburgh generally notice the Castle first, lording over the city from its volcanic perch. Climbing up the steps from Waverley Station onto Princes Street, one sees a city like something out of a fairy tale, all turrets and spires and flags and the sound of pipes wafting across on the breeze. The less inspired modern architecture of Princes Street itself tends to be missed at first, lost in the overall setting. At least, this was how I first saw Edinburgh. Having briefly visited here twice before, I arrived in Edinburgh to begin postgraduate studies in September, 1994 with a tremendously powerful visual image of the city in mind. For weeks, I would use any moment of free time to wander around the cobbled streets and narrow wynds and closes of the Old Town, gaping at the buildings and imagining the myriad of histories which must have taken place in those dark corners. It is clichéd, perhaps, to say that it was all so very different to the Californian suburb where I'd spent most of my life, but no less true. For me, the prospect of living in Edinburgh (rather than simply visiting it as a tourist) meant becoming part of that history, as though the city existed in another time than the one I belonged to.

Gradually, my romantic first impressions of the city began to give way. I began to notice how many of the old buildings had been restored or replaced and given over entirely to tourism and that Auld Edinburgh (like Bonny Scotland) was very much an image either marketed to outsiders or confined to an unspecified past.

Looking back now, of course, I realise how naive my first impressions were, but like many aspiring anthropologists (who have not yet been thoroughly disillusioned by post-modern angst; post-modernism did not figure in my first degree), I carried with me an active imagination. I wanted to find somewhere *real*, a place that was truly, authentically itself; whatever California was to me in those days, it was certainly neither authentically anything nor ethnographically interesting. The timelessness one sees in one's first impression of this place soon began to fade out of sight.

Scotland, I soon began to realise, was undergoing substantial changes in many ways, as it still is. Socially, culturally, and politically, I gained a sense that identities here were being negotiated and renegotiated, often publicly, and that the majority of cultural forms, from literature to sport, were being filtered through a thick web of identity politics. As Scotland's once and future capital, Edinburgh sits at the centre of those changes and negotiations. Instead of trying to capture a false sense of stasis, I began to take an increasing interest in the ways these changes were, and still are, affecting life in present day Edinburgh.

Particular images are marketed so aggressively and have long been so hegemonic in representations of Scotland and Scottishness that it takes the newcomer a long time to see past them. I was in Edinburgh for two years before beginning my official fieldwork; had I not been, I believe the impressions guiding me through the "field" and thus the results of that work, would have been very different. Tartanry, Bonnie Prince Charlie and the 1745 Jacobite uprising, Rob Roy and Braveheart, "Balmorality": these are all parts of what Tom Nairn (1977) calls the Tartan Monster. It is a false consciousness of sorts, he argues, which has become a substitute for

genuinely vibrant (and, importantly to his argument, nationalist) cultural development. Edinburgh is a place where these images vie with opinions like Nairn's. I have often watched the people I have met engage with myths, often infusing them with a sort of playful irony instead of discounting them altogether. Rather than adding to the already large body of Scottish literary, historical and sociological literature which involves itself in the task of myth-debunking, I shall look at the ways in which people use (or reject) stereotypical images to suit themselves. In order to do this, I am relying in this thesis on both my first impressions and those which have come with being here over time. I draw on experiences I have had throughout my time here, although of course I try to place the actual fieldwork period of early August 1996 to mid-September 1997 at the heart of the discussion.

### *The city*

Contemporary Edinburgh is framed by the Pentland Hills to the south and the Forth, which opens from a muddy trickle into the wide firth and finally the North Sea to the north-east. In the east, the city gives way to the coastal communities of East Lothian, and to the west, increasingly, to new suburbs and business developments. Built on a series of volcanic hills, the city maintains panoramic views across the hills and water and its streets remain exposed to the winds that blow nearly constantly. Edinburgh conversation centres often around these winds, the sea mist called *haar*, and the rain that lashes the city when the storms roll in.

It is a beautiful city, and many literary descriptions of it highlight the way the land below seems to be less built *over* than it does to give rise to the stony architecture. Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote of the city:

By all the canons of romance, the place demands to be half deserted and leaning towards decay; birds we might admit in profusion, the play of the sun and the winds, and a few gypsies encamped in the chief thoroughfare; but these citizens with their cabs and tramways, their trains and posters, are altogether out of key (1903; 9).

The highest (architectural) point and symbolic centre of the city is the castle, which sits at the top end of a ridge which then drops steeply down on three sides, making the fortress virtually impregnable. The castle is really an assortment of buildings of various ages, from the tiny twelfth-century St. Margaret's Chapel to the nineteenth century barracks which are still used by the castle's military garrison. However, the history of the fortress extends back to pre-Anglo-Saxon days, when southern Scotland and northern England were ruled by P-Celtic (the ancestor of modern Welsh and Breton) speaking Britons. According to the few remaining written sixth century sources, the area which now comprises the Lothians, the eastern side of the Borders, and Edinburgh was part of the kingdom of Gododdin (Daiches 1978, Lynch 1991). The capital of Gododdin was *Dineidin* or *Duneden*, meaning "fortress on the hill" and contemporary historians trace the initial fortress and settlement to these Celtic roots, rather than to the seventh century Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon king Edwin, who is popularly believed to be the founder of the city.

Now, the Castle is invaded annually by roughly one million visitors (McCrone, *et al* 1995; 138), making it Scotland's most popular tourist attraction. Much of the Old Town, which extends from the Castle at the top of the ridge to

Holyrood Palace at the bottom and spills steeply down the south side of it, has been taken over by the tourist industry: shops selling woollens (particularly tartan) and other “Scottish” merchandise, restaurants, and museums cater for the huge numbers of people who flock to the city annually, particularly in August during the Festival and Fringe. Although people do live in the flats above the Royal Mile shops, the Old Town is no longer primarily a residential area.

North of and parallel to the Royal Mile is Princes Street, which, with the streets running off of it, forms Edinburgh’s main shopping area and throngs with both locals and tourists. Between the Old Town and Princes Street are Princes Street Gardens, built in what had been until the mid-eighteenth century a highly polluted loch. The gardens are used for a variety of purposes, from mass events such as the end of Festival fireworks display and the huge Hogmanay (New Year) celebration, to casual lounging in the sun. The Royal Mile, Princes Street, and the Gardens form what could be perhaps thought of as the city’s spine, with other business and residential areas spreading around them in all directions.

Princes Street marks the southern boundary of the New Town, the geometrically patterned Georgian area of the city which was designed in the mid-eighteenth century. Prior to the construction of the New Town, Edinburgh’s residents lived in the lofty and cramped Old Town “closes”, which consisted of multiple dwellings sharing a common stair and courtyard. Frequently, the closes housed a wide cross-section of society, with the wealthy living higher up and the poor living closer to the street. The construction of the New Town, with its wide streets, gardens and spacious dwellings, marked an exodus of the wealthier classes



from the Old Town and is often described to have been "...a very deliberate and dramatic step in the formation of ecological and social barriers in the city"(McCrone & Elliott 1980; 2). Parts of the Old Town, such as the Canongate at the bottom of the Royal Mile, were allowed to fall into decay and effectively became a slum (see Noble 1985; 70) until more recent restorations in the second half of this century.

In large part, the tourists confine themselves to this immediately central area and do not venture into other parts of the city in such significant numbers.

Throughout all of August, the centre of Edinburgh resembles something between a carnival and a theme park; most of my friends here either love the Festival or hate it. Some embrace it every year and others do their best to avoid it, which is sometimes difficult.

Previously working-class residential areas such as Leith (the port area, at the north edge of the city) and the Southside are being or have been cleaned up and taken over by students, professionals, and a growing middle class. Although many of the city's homeless congregate in the centre, the poorer residential areas have been pushed further and further to the outskirts, thus rendering them less visible to newcomers and giving their residents less access to city-centre facilities or activities.

Older Edinburgh residents I have met have frequently commented to me upon how the city has changed in their lifetimes; their opinions about the "improvements" to parts of it are generally a mixture of appreciation and disapproval. Often they berate what they perceive to be the decline of local communities within the city and say that the city caters better to tourists and students than it does to local residents, particularly those without large incomes. At the present time, most of the people I

know here are full of speculation about the effects the impending Parliament will have not only upon the governing of Scotland but upon the traffic, housing prices, council taxes, facilities, and perhaps even identity, of Edinburgh.

Not only do the majority of “high cultural” events such as theatre take place in the city centre, but so too do most of the folk and other types of musical performances (though there are a few pub sessions or ceilidhs in less central areas such as Leith or Gorgie-Dalry). The weekly round of sessions ranges between roughly ten pubs in or near the city centre, although it would be impossible to give a specific number because new sessions are started and flagging ones abandoned with some frequency. Some of these pubs are known as folk pubs and host sessions several or most nights of the week. Others do so only once weekly. Although different sessions cater for different musical interests and abilities, some people perform or listen every night of the week. Edinburgh’s two folk clubs are also in the city centre, one operating every Wednesday and the other every Saturday<sup>1</sup>. These charge entrance fees of up to six pounds, which, as some of my friends complain, prevents listeners with less money from attending regularly. The pub sessions, drinks notwithstanding, are free.

Migrating around the session and folk club circuit, one tends to run into the same faces several nights a week. Nearly all of these frequent performers or listeners live in or near the city centre. Although the majority of them do not necessarily have large incomes, they have enough disposable income to buy drinks several nights a week and pay entrance fees to the folk clubs. It is harder for people who live further

out of the centre to be as involved in the folk scene unless they drive and are willing to forego alcohol.

The folk scene in Edinburgh is stereotypically dominated by the urban “middle class”, although this is by no means always the case. Although the reasons for this are perhaps in some ways aesthetic, as is generally argued by observers of the folk scene (see MacKinnon 1993), it is also true that pragmatic, geographical issues such as transportation mean that residents of city or peripheral housing estates, suburbs, or of many rural areas, have far less opportunity to either learn or listen to the music. Likewise, many of the active participants in the folk scene are single people who have no partners (or, have partners who are also actively involved in the music) or children to support and so pump a large amount of their income into their musical pursuits.

The Edinburgh city centre is a cosmopolitan place (this is often, wrongly in my mind, equated by both academic and touristic observers with a lack of “Scottishness”) and the folk scene attracts people from a diversity of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds from both within Scotland and outside of it. Far from being the only “outsider” surrounded by locals, I met other Americans, Canadians, many English and Irish, Australians and New Zealanders, and a diverse handful from around Europe. Some of these are temporary visitors, others are permanent settlers. They bring influences into the scene, and into the music itself, and these are for the most part readily accepted. So although the setting, much of the music, and the political sentiments are Scottish, the folk scene cannot be described as insular or

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<sup>1</sup> Though the Tron Pub, which has housed the popular Saturday evening folk club (as well as folk sessions, jazz and song-writers’ evenings), ceased all live music as of the end of April 1999 so the

culturally inward looking. Edinburgh is known as the centre of the Scottish folk revival, and for sheer volume of musicians and venues, is unrivalled. Some people do complain, however, that the large number of professional musicians means that the Edinburgh scene has become élitist and that less accomplished performers are pushed out of popular sessions. Upon meeting musicians from other parts of Scotland at folk festivals, I have frequently encountered the perception that both Edinburgh and the Edinburgh folk scene are snobbish.

Thus, it should be said that cultural life, both within and outside of the folk musical scene, in the centre of Edinburgh is not entirely representative of that to be experienced in the other Scottish urban centres, such as Glasgow and Aberdeen. Likewise, the musical circles here take on particular characteristics *because* they are situated within Edinburgh. Although I did no real comparative research, musicians who have lived in the other cities tell me Edinburgh is unique in many ways. Although much of what I write here will not necessarily be entirely unique to Edinburgh, I am aware that my own experience does not extend outside the city's boundaries in any great detail. For descriptions of what occurs in other parts, I am reliant (apart from a few brief trips to Glasgow and parts of the Highlands) upon the words of experienced friends or upon the little that has been written elsewhere.

We shall move now from Edinburgh itself to the folk music which takes place in its pubs, halls, community centres and classrooms.

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brewery can turn it into a student theme pub. The folk club itself is currently looking for a new home.

## **Music Circles**

Previous ethnographic treatment of contemporary folk musical performance in Britain has tended to focus attention primarily upon that which occurs in folk clubs (see Finnegan 1989; MacKinnon 1993; Munro 1996; Pickering & Green, eds. 1987). In the earlier days of the revival, folk clubs occupied a much more central and driving position within the folk scene generally than they do currently in Edinburgh. My work therefore considers folk clubs as only one realm in which folk music takes place. Other, more popular, realms are the pub sessions and ceilidhs.

These three regular types of folk musical performance are the ones with which I have become most familiar during my time in Edinburgh, and are thus the ones I will focus attention upon here. There are other occasional events such as concerts, the Edinburgh Folk Festival, and the folk musical gigs offered as part of the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe. These can be seen as special events in the annual cycle of folk musical life in the city, and are never quite the same from one year to the next. The Edinburgh Folk Festival lasted for ten days during my fieldwork year. Subsequently, due to financial constraints, it has been cut down to a long weekend and thus lost many of the aspects of ‘endurance ritual’ it seemed to hold for many people previously. Although the folk festival and concerts I have been to inform my general understandings of the folk scene, I will not consider them specially here.

I title this section “Music circles”, because the Edinburgh folk “scene” is more accurately viewed as a number of overlapping circles. Many people tend to make niches for themselves within one of these circles, which might consist of the participants in one or two particular sessions, and seldom venture into any others.

Other people move freely between any number of circles, dabbling (or excelling) in various types of performance as they are so inclined. For this reason, the folk scene is really many ‘scenes’, and generalisation about what occurs within it is much more difficult than many non-folkie people seem to believe. By necessity, then, this section will consist of a number of sketches that characterise my experience of these musical circles, rather than a comprehensive account.

I also use the word “circle” because it represents the effect that these musical performances can, ideally, create; music envelops people, binding a gathering of individuals in a way few other art forms can do. Sitting around a session table or joining in the chorus of a well-loved song can sometimes work to make the world outside fade into the night, as everyone is caught in the spell of the music. Whatever differences there are between the various styles of music and musical performance, this feeling of involvement, of *immersion*, seems to be the most gratifying mark of a “good” performance for the people I know.

### *Pub singing*

Pub singing takes two forms: that of the paid, individual singer/guitarist and that of the singing session or “sing-around”. Both are relatively common in Edinburgh, although many session singers do not regularly like to listen to individual singers. Sometimes people who consider themselves to be “real” or serious folkies portray these pub singers to be at the outskirts of the scene, performing largely for audiences of tourists and other generally “non-folkie” (at least, non-performers).

This type of value judgement is largely an arbitrary one, in that the material most individual pub singers perform is not always substantially different from that heard in many singing sessions, or is drawn from material popularised by bands who rose to fame in earlier days of the revival, such as The Corries and The Dubliners. The individual pub singers with whom I am acquainted are irritated by this sort of attitude, which they frequently counter with a statement like, "*Well, it's a paying gig.*" Professional pub singers are generally far more constrained by the demands of a popular audience than they may be when they record or sing for fun at sessions.

### *Footstomping at the Scotsman Lounge*

The Scotsman is a small pub on Cockburn Street, the steep, curving street which connects the Royal Mile with Market Street, just south of Waverley Station. Although most of Edinburgh's "serious" folkies do not frequent this pub or consider it to be a central venue in the scene, it was my first introduction to folk singing in the city. I was first taken there by two song and beer-loving Irishmen I knew in my first months in Edinburgh.

The decor of the pub is simple: a worn wooden floor, wooden stools and a number of upturned whisky casks used as tables. The ceiling is timbered and the once white walls are nicotine-yellow and decorated with photographs of Scottish regimental pipe bands, posters advertising various artistic events in the city, and paintings depicting the battles of Bannockburn and Culloden. Hanging conspicuously above the bar is the famous proclamation from the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath:

So long as a hundred of us remain, we will never submit to the domination of the English, for it is not for power or glory or riches that we fight, but for liberty alone, which no honest man will lose but with his life.<sup>2</sup>

This statement hangs in many bars, I have noticed, but rarely as obviously as it does here.

Owing to its central location, the pub attracts a fairly large number of tourists year round. It is also frequented by soldiers from the regiments stationed at the barracks in the southwest of the city, near the Pentlands, and by many ordinary Edinburgh “folk”, of various descriptions and ages. It is not an overtly touristic or theme pub, but it is one well used to the constant stream of outsiders who find their way into it. Most evenings, particularly Fridays and Saturdays, it attracts a lively and sizeable crowd. Despite the military nature of the pub’s decor, the atmosphere at The Scotsman tends to be good-natured. The landlord, an enormous ginger-haired piper, an imposing and often kilted figure, keeps order by his simple presence and by occasionally removing potential drunken troublemakers quite literally by picking them up by the collar and carrying them out the door.

Most nights there is live music. This generally takes the shape of an individual folk singer/guitarist, or sometimes a singer accompanied by one or two instrumentalists, such as a fiddler or a flautist/whistler. The music is undoubtedly one of the main attractions for most of the patrons, many of whom stand in front of the performers, stamping their feet, singing along and making requests. During instrumental sets, people sometimes try to dance in the tiny space between the

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<sup>2</sup> Lynch (1991; 111) tells us that the Declaration of Arbroath, “...the most celebrated document in Scottish history,” was written in 1320 as a letter to the Pope, requesting that he lift the sentence of excommunication from Robert Bruce. Relatively unknown to the general populace until the



whisky casks and the performer, spontaneously birling each other by the elbows and usually knocking over drinks.

Bobby has had a regular gig in The Scotsman throughout the time I have been in Edinburgh. Originally from Kircaldy in Fife, he now tries to make a living as a folk singer in Edinburgh, although he does have a degree in sociology and politics from Edinburgh University. In his late twenties, he has a powerful voice and a deep commitment to both socialism and nationalism. In the pub, he tends to stick to what might be called pub favourites, songs such as the Irish “Whisky in the Jar” or “Irish Rover”, the Scottish “Bonnie Lass o’ Fyvie”, “Bonnie Dundee” and “Hey Johnnie Cope”, Eric Bogle’s well-known anti-war ballad, “No Man’s Land”, as well as more popular songs such as Van Morrison’s “Brown Eyed-Girl”. In between these favourites, he accompanies a fiddler or flautist on sets of high-speed jigs and reels, or finds space for the more politically charged songs which are his first love: Pete Coe’s “Sold Down the River,” about Tory-led de-industrialisation, Ewan MacColl’s “Moving On Song,” about the plight of Travelling people, Christy Moore’s “Viva le Quince Brigada” about the Spanish civil war, Jim MacLean’s “Hush Hush,” about the Highland Clearances, or sometimes “The Fields of Athenry”, a contemporary Irish song about the potato famine and transportation to Australia, which has come to be one of the anthems of Glasgow Celtic football supporters. His often pro-Irish and Scottish nationalist or pro-socialist songs do not seem to rile the soldiers, many of whom may not pay particularly close attention to the words.

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seventeenth century, the declaration came to occupy, in some nineteenth and twentieth century imaginations, the status of a Scottish declaration of independence.

People sing along with choruses they know. The Scotsman is a small pub; one has little choice but listen to the music, to be engaged by it and join in the singing. Drinkers are in close proximity with each other, and with the performers, and this physical closeness heightens a sense that the audience is somehow involved in the music, and with each other. It is not the place to go if one wants to listen seriously or critically; Bobby tells me that sometimes he far prefers this to the more serious atmosphere of the folk clubs. Michael, the Irishman who introduced me to The Scotsman, said "*The best thing about this wee pub is you can just get drunk, close your eyes and sing. What life is all about, really.*"

### *Late nights at The Oak*

When the Scotsman and most other pubs in the Edinburgh centre close, people who have not yet had their fill of singing tend to head for the Royal Oak on Infirmary Street, just off South Bridge. The statement, often uttered by singers I know (myself included), "*I wound up in The Oak last night*" generally implies a distinct shortage of sleep, a voice hoarse from singing over the din and frequently a bad hangover, and inspires sympathetic shakes of the head from other folkies. This pub consists of two cramped and very basic bar areas, one upstairs and one down, and there is usually music on both levels, until well after two a.m. If the walls in the Scotsman are nicotine-yellow, those in the Oak are a deep, mottled brown; one can leave the place feeling like a smoked mackerel after only a couple of hours.

The Oak hosts regular singers every night of the week. Unlike those at the Scotsman, these singers are un-amplified and sit in a corner of the pub, rather than

standing. As such, they are less imposing upon the audience, and frequently it is difficult to hear them unless one is standing right near their table. Some singers will ask the audience to keep their voices down, and quieter songs tend to command respectful ears. However, many of the singers at the Oak will pass the guitar around to other singers, both to other regular participants and to those who may simply be passing through.

Maggie is one of the Oak's best singers. A cheerful woman in middle age, and a nurse in her daytime incarnation, Maggie quietly leads the session with a large and diverse collection of songs, an expressive voice, and basic finger-picked guitar accompaniment. Her songs range from traditional Scots to contemporary American; many of them are marked by the humour and lightness with which Maggie treats her own performances.

Although Maggie and most of the other regular singers in the Oak make an effort to prioritise folk and traditional songs, there are no real rules governing the material people sing in the Oak. Sometimes people bring out Beatles' songs or other pop or sometimes jazz material, old music hall songs, or self-penned numbers. Some people strum powerfully on the guitar and encourage rousing choruses. Others sing unaccompanied songs or ballads, during which everyone else falls silent, listening.

The Oak does not attract as many tourists as does the Scotsman, but those who do find their way in are frequently asked if they have songs to sing. It is not unusual to hear songs from any part of the world in the Royal Oak and people seem appreciative of them all: impressions that folk music is about some kind of *pure* national culture would not likely survive a night in the Oak. One night there might

be a Chilean man singing the well known Scottish song “Wild Mountain Thyme.” Another night there might be a pair of Scots, one on guitar and the other on five-string banjo, playing American Old Time and Bluegrass tunes. One night I met an English actor (a veteran of Coronation Street) who was singing a song about a Scottish colliery disaster, as learned from the Irish singer Christy Moore. The number of singers who make themselves heard in the Oak would be impossible to count.

The emphasis is upon the participation here, but there is perhaps another aspect of what happens at the Oak, and other similar sessions. Session leaders ask people to “give us a song,” which can be, in many ways, taken quite literally. Being asked to “give” a song is like being asked to tell a story: to make one’s own contribution to the evening’s entertainment. While it is not an obligation, there is something of an expectation that, if one is known as a singer, one will sing. People are said to “bring” songs, to “give” songs, to “have” songs, to “get” songs from other people.

Taking part in these open sessions, I began to visualise what was happening as a kind of musical gift-giving session. If one sings a song that somebody else particularly appreciates, one is more or less obliged to tell them where it came from (if they ask), even perhaps write down the words or record it for them. It is as if, by singing, one offers the song to anyone else who might like it and take it up. This is part of what is known as the “folk process”, in which material is put into the public realm, from which anyone can learn it and individualise it. At the same time,

however, it is not good etiquette to “steal” someone else’s songs: to start singing songs that someone else at that particular session sings frequently.

As will be discussed in greater depth in chapter six, there is a powerful ethos of egalitarianism within the folk scene. Although this egalitarianism often does not manifest itself in practice, the Royal Oak sessions perhaps come as close to it as any in Edinburgh. There is no clear division at all between performers and audience members, even in a spatial sense. Some singers will sit at two or three tables in one corner of the pub, but people standing at the bar or by the door are just as welcome to “give a song” as those at the tables. The room becomes, in effect, one big session table.

Often, at other sessions, if one does not get a seat at the table, one is more or less excluded from the performance or relegated to its outskirts and playing to the backs of the others. Most sessions tend to occupy one corner or end of a pub, to be given attention or not as the other drinkers choose. It is different at the Oak. Participation, at least by singing along with choruses, is nearly demanded because one is inescapably in the centre of the action. Instrumental sessions, which are by nature more exclusive than singing ones, are not favoured in the Oak, and although the occasional instrumentalist may join in, song is always given priority. In the Oak, everyone from the few students who sometimes wander in to the swaying drunk in the corner is a potential performer.

### *Other singing sessions*

Most singing sessions in Edinburgh are what are known as sing-arounds. At these, all of the singers sit around a big table and take turns singing one or two songs each. Generally there is a session leader, whose job it is to nominate singers and ensure that the session maintains momentum. If there is a lull, the leader will sometimes fill space with several songs of his or her own. Newcomers to these sessions tend to sit slightly apart from the other singers, until asked if they would like to sing. Sessions with a good handful of regular performers begin to acquire the characteristics, eccentricities and preferences of the individuals involved. Particular sessions may become known for loud, chorusy, guitary songs and others may prioritise unaccompanied traditional singing. Some may appeal to older singers and others attract younger ones.

Although the types of material performed might differ, the emphasis at most sing-around sessions is placed upon the close relationship between folksong and storytelling. Although certainly people like to hear pristine voices and skilled accompaniments, these are in many ways secondary requirements for a folk singer. The singers I know often talk about learning songs as a process of internalising them, of learning to feel them, of learning to sing as the voice of the characters in the song. Certainly the links between Scots ballads or songs and both oral and written poetry are well known among both folk scholars and singers; these links occur in both traditional song and in contemporary material. Traditional singing is as much about the ability to spin a good yarn as it is about impressive vocal quality. Likewise, contemporary political song relies upon the power of the singer to perform with

conviction, to convince the audience that there is truth in its message. The most respected session singers are those who engage the audiences and communicate the stories.

In exchange, the audience (composed of the other singers and bystanders) is expected to listen. "Giving a song", like telling a story, is a form of communication which requires active listening as well as active telling. Here is an important difference between song and instrumental music, and this perhaps explains why the folk scene overall tends to divide itself down this line. Instrumentalists play together for the joy of playing together; the effect upon the audience is, in many ways, secondary to the pleasure gained simply by doing it. If the other patrons in the pub do not pay particular attention, instrumentalists never seem to mind. Singers, on the other hand, rely upon the ears of their listeners; most singers agree that singing is only enjoyable and affective if one is given attention.

It is rare for singing sessions to continue unchanged for many years running. Performers are often transitory; they come for a few weeks or even a year and then stop and other people with other styles take their places. Frequently, instrumentalists begin to take over the session and singers are pushed to one side or given rare opportunities to sing in between sets of tunes or when the players break for a round of drinks. The first appearance of instrumentalists at singing sessions tends to irritate singers, who feel their territory is being invaded.

Sometimes pub managers decide to host other sorts of entertainment and displace the singers or musicians altogether. Thus, while it is easy to gain the impression that these sorts of sessions are well-established, traditional, long-running



features (traits which seem to appeal to many people who come to sessions), this is generally not the case. There is little permanence in the Edinburgh folk world.

### *Instrumental sessions*

Edinburgh has more instrumental sessions than singing ones, and has more publicly performing instrumentalists than singers. As I have indicated previously, this has not always been the case; song was at the forefront of the revival from the fifties onwards and has only been largely superseded by instrumental music in the eighties and nineties. Like singing sessions, the instrumental sessions take place in pubs and will vary in content and structure according to the individuals present.

It is possible to draw only a very rough distinction between what might be called open and closed sessions, or sessions at which anyone is welcome versus those in which players participate largely upon the request of the session leaders. This boundary is not fixed, and extremely competent players can obviously cross it with far more ease than can those with less experience. Most of the sessions in the centre of Edinburgh are open only to people who are of professional standard or very close to it. The sessions more accessible to less experienced players tend to be found in a handful of pubs scattered throughout the city.

My experience as a player does not extend to the more closed sessions, because my own playing is far from the standard they require. Having spoken to musicians who do perform in these sessions, which tend to be located in pubs which attract sizeable numbers of tourists and are thus more “on display” to non-folkie audiences, I have heard a variety of opinions about them. Some people genuinely do

enjoy these performances, enjoy making the music and the attention given by the audience. Others take a more professional attitude towards them: they are paying gigs and quite tiresome. The enthusiasm and spontaneity can be as much part of the performance as the music itself.

As mentioned above, instrumental sessions are quite a different sort of performance than singing ones. The most important features of the folk singing session, in my mind, are the blurring of the distinction between performer and audience, and the emphasis placed upon an interaction between performer and audience. The introduction of musical instruments (above the guitar used or not used as accompaniment to song) automatically divides people between those who play and those who do not, and thus between who makes music and who listens. Players direct themselves inward, as it were; that is, they sit facing each other round the table and do not necessarily actively engage with the audience. They do not introduce their tunes and listeners tend not to applaud (applause comes generally from tourists and those less familiar with the session format). Music is all played by memory and the appearance of a sheet of notation is regarded as a fairly major faux-pas. The ideal instrumental session is one in which all players participate equally and the sound is rich and balanced, however it tends to be the case that particularly loud instruments or attention-seeking players will dominate, even drown the others out somewhat. In Edinburgh, fiddlers in particular tend to have reputations as folk prima donnas.

Within the bounds of the session, it is far more common for every instrumentalist to play every tune, or most tunes, than it is for singers to join in on every song. Whereas singers take turns around the table, instrumentalists generally

try to play tunes everyone can join in on and any individual attempt to dominate the spotlight is generally frowned upon. Likewise, most tunes are not played as though they have a story to tell (although it can be, and often is, argued that they *do*) but rather in order to generate a kind of energy and lively noise. In most open sessions with many participants, particularly soulful players tend to be drowned out by the overall sound. More formally organised sessions, which tend to have far fewer players and a better balance of instruments, allow more space for individual interpretations of tunes.

One of the marked differences between sessions in the busy city-centre pubs and those in the more relaxed ones elsewhere is the size and nature of the audience. The city-centre pubs attract tourists in large numbers, many of whom stand near the session table, actively listening and applauding. The musicians find themselves on display more in such a setting, and thus the performance becomes, by nature, more formal and demanding. Away from the crowds of tourists, players frequently pause for breaks, to have conversations with their friends, to joke with on-lookers. Likewise, listeners in the less touristy pubs tend to pay less explicit attention to the music, or accept a far less structured performance.

### *Sessions in the West End: music for life*

The bar of the West End Hotel is a rather nondescript sort of place, greenish carpets and curtains, flowery seat upholstery, and pinkish striped wallpaper. It is a long, relatively narrow room on the ground floor of the modest, Georgian hotel. A sizeable collection of regulars frequent the bar, from young men in football strips to

older couples in tweed jackets. The slightly worn, comfortable bar is the type that would seem more at home in a village or small-town hotel rather than in the up-market and cosmopolitan west end.

It is also one of the favourite haunts of the city's population of Gaelic speakers, some of whom are migrants into Edinburgh from the West Highlands and others who are Gaelic learners. The Edinburgh Gaelic Choir sometimes sings there after their rehearsals, their harmonies rising over the chatter in the bar. Sometimes pipers practice in one of the large rooms upstairs and their tunes can be heard filtering down into the bar from above. Gaelic occasionally can be heard among the mixture of Scots and English; one sometimes hears the three languages emerge from the mouth of the same person, jumbled into a single, expressive sentence.

The West End plays host to folk music most evenings, including one singing session and two or three instrumental ones. These are easy-going evenings which attract a wide range of players of all different levels. Not many tourists come in, and while most of the other patrons appreciate the music, they do not always actively listen or expect highly polished performances. For many of them, the music becomes simply a pleasant background noise rather than the central focus of attention. At the same time, however, many people have told me that the music is what attracts them to that particular bar over others in the area. *"If there's no music being played, I always feel like something's missing,"* I have often been told.

The musicians usually begin to arrive just after nine o'clock, instrument cases of various shapes and sizes carried or slung over their shoulders. The instrumentalists themselves are a variety of people, most of whom have non-musical

daytime occupations; some are manual workers and some are teachers or work in other service-related professions, some are students. Jobs are mentioned in passing, but nobody pays particular attention to what the others do for a living. The youngest players are in their early to mid twenties, and the oldest is a man in his early eighties, who still makes fiddles and spends afternoons busking on Rose Street.

Regulars greet the musicians with smiles and nods of appreciation. Putting down their instruments and taking off their coats, the first musicians to arrive will push some small tables together to form one bigger one and claim seats, then go to the bar for their pints. Nearly everyone drinks pints of lager, heavy beer or stout, although some people stick to fizzy drinks or orange juice. The sessions quite frequently happen during the week, and some musicians drink generous amounts, as if in defiance of the fact that they will have to get up early for work the next morning. Usually, people spend half an hour or so talking and drinking, catching up on the week's gossip, before taking their instruments out of the cases and tuning up.

Fiddles are by far the most numerous and popular instrument, and tend to be regarded as the central instrument in the Scottish folk tradition. Accordions tend to be common in dance bands but less numerous in sessions. Flutes and whistles make regular appearances, and one or two guitars which, played simply, add a rhythm and bass-line which holds the whole thing together. Other stringed instruments such as mandolins (which are popular but so quiet they are almost impossible to hear in loud sessions), banjos (which are either loved or hated and are frequently the target of the same sorts of jokes one hears applied to lawyers in other circles), and the increasingly trendy bouzoukis, appear more sporadically. In open sessions such as

these, nobody controls the balance of instruments represented. They thus tend to be dominated by fiddles, often to the annoyance of people wanting to hear the other instruments.

The session does not have a leader, although some players are more happy than others to start tunes off. One person will simply begin to play and everyone else will join in. Although there is no pre-agreed repertoire of tunes, there are tunes which are well known in the Edinburgh scene and which most people know. Session players tend to stick to these in order to avoid excluding people, but sometimes will indulge in occasional individual efforts. The more experienced players hardly put their instruments down all night, but others will sit out ones they do not know or will play along quietly, attempting to learn as they go. Beginning with a single player, a set of tunes will gradually gather strength and energy as more people join in, until it is a rich and bubbling sound which fills the entire bar. Conversation at the other end of the room sometimes stops as people listen to the music, or sometimes grows louder in competition with it. The relaxed hush in the bar is replaced by a lively din.

Sometimes somebody plays a striking tune that many of the others do not know. When this happens, the other players fall silent, listening to the single fiddle or whistle playing, accompanied perhaps by a guitarist. Faces light up at the sound, and at the pleasure of discovering a sweet new tune. The tunes which seem to earn this sort of attention tend, often, not to be the high speed jigs and reels but rather the slow airs, waltzes or sometimes the more lilting marches or hornpipes: they are simple and playing them well is more a matter of investing them with feeling rather than having athletic fingers. As soon as the player finishes, all the others lean in to

praise the tune and ask what it is and where they can find the music or a recording of it.

Good guitar accompaniment can make a tune. I have heard muted debates about the place of the guitar within traditional Celtic music, but in most sessions and bands, the guitar has a central place (although it is becoming fashionable to use a bouzouki or a mandola for rhythm accompaniment in place of guitar). My friend Tom, a man in his early forties with spidery fingers and long hair which falls over his guitar, often closes his eyes as he plays, a cigarette drooping from his mouth or stuck between the strings up near the machine-heads. He has spent years playing blues and country music, and infuses his accompaniments with an intensely soulful quality which is particularly effective when backing only one or two lead instruments.

Most of the tunes played at sessions are jigs and reels. Scottish players also include strathspeys, which are in a 4/4 time signature like reels but punctuated by a syncopated rhythm which is sometimes known as the “Scotch snap”. Pipe marches (usually in 6/8 time) are also popular, as are Shetland reels, which borrow stylistic elements from the Scottish, Irish and Scandinavian traditions.

Cape Breton tunes are also increasingly popular. In recent years, Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia has produced a relatively large number of prodigious young fiddlers who have become known throughout Europe and North America. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Cape Breton received a significant number of émigré Highlanders, who kept their tunes and dances alive and vigorous there. Many contemporary Scottish players look to Cape Breton for what they see to be a more unadulterated Highland musical tradition than that which exists here.



There is often, in individual sessions, a prioritisation of Irish tunes over Scottish ones or vice versa. There are quite a few Irish people active in the Edinburgh scene and many of them play only Irish tunes; some Scottish players are annoyed by this and, in return, refuse to play Irish tunes. I have been told that at one time, it was rare to hear Scottish tunes played in Edinburgh sessions, however this appears to be changing and Scottish tunes are now receiving nearly equal playing time.

If the session “works”, the individual players find a mutual rhythm and momentum, and the music seems to flow almost automatically. If the session works, the sound will be rich and balanced, and the playing can continue easily until closing time, and individual players become equally important parts of the ensemble. People talk about how the music takes over, surrounds them and makes them forget about anything outside of that circle.

For many reasons, this does not always happen. Sometimes in a noisy bar, if the session table is too long or there are too many players, it becomes difficult for people to hear each other and they fall out of time with each other. Sometimes particular individuals do not listen to the subtle cues people give each other, playing over the top of other tunes or joining in at an entirely different speed than the tune was started in. Sometimes people just play badly.

As with any sort of performance, ‘good playing’ relies not just upon the basic skill of the musician but also upon his or her mood and level of energy, and upon the relationships between the players. I have heard people blame bad playing upon tiredness, distraction by other problems, even bad weather; the close relationship

between emotion, bodily practice, and performance (which can be seen as a combination of these) is acknowledged and made apparent by these musicians. Music is used as an escape from the stresses of work, but at the same time, these stresses can work powerfully to prevent one from enjoying the music or injecting enough energy into it. For this reason, as I shall discuss later, I believe this sort of musical performance must be seen as supplemental to everyday life but also as part of it. Many ethnographic treatments of music (and perhaps even more apparently, the *lack* of attention given to music in most ethnography) place music at the sidelines of daily life: as something that accompanies particular rituals or is performed for specific occasions or purposes. At least for the people I know, music is far more important than that; it is part of life.

### *Folk Clubs*

Edinburgh had two folk clubs until April, 1999. The Edinburgh Folk Club is based at The Pleasance, a bar and performance venue owned by Edinburgh University but frequently used by a variety of other performance groups. The Tron Folk Club met in the basement of the Tron pub, just off the Royal Mile (see footnote 1 earlier in this chapter). Although folk clubs, with a profound emphasis upon song, did formerly reside at the centre of the British folk revival, they have now largely been overshadowed by the popularity of instrumental sessions and ceilidh dancing. This may be particularly true in Edinburgh, where there are free pub sessions to be found every night of the week, although it is still the case that in some smaller towns the only folk music to be found is at the monthly or weekly folk club meeting.

Every folk club varies slightly in its style and emphasis. Some are more formal and tend only to host well-known performers, while others offer sing-arounds and numerous shorter floor spots to regular members. The Edinburgh clubs tend toward the former, and draw in some of the best-known names in the Scottish, Irish and English folk worlds. Main performers do two sets of roughly forty-five minutes, separated by an interval. There tend to be two supporting acts, who may do half an hour before each main set, or sometimes individual singers will do shorter floor-spots of ten to fifteen minutes; generally these are booked in advance. Main performers tend to be either individual singer/instrumentalists or bands who do both song and instrumental music. Occasionally, the performers do purely instrumental material. As with material performed in the folk scene as a whole, emphasis has substantially shifted away from contemporary political (and particularly American political) song to more traditional material; however, many performers combine traditional song with their own self-penned social commentaries or those of other well-known writers.

Folk club audiences in Edinburgh, though not entirely homogeneous, are older and perhaps more consistently middle-class than those at pub sessions; in many cases, clubs attract people who have been folk-club members since early days of the revival. There are many teachers, university lecturers and researchers, and other service or community-oriented professionals of various sorts in attendance. While one finds many of these sorts of people throughout the folk scene, sessions tend to be a little more diverse. A number of people have commented to me that they feel folk clubs to be the “intellectual” side of the scene; for some this is a complaint, for others

it is appreciated. On the other hand, this type of comment can be accompanied with the suggestion that some folk club goers are too intellectual and “politically correct” to take part in the smoke-infused and often raucous sessions.

Folk club audiences in Edinburgh are accustomed to top quality performances and the atmosphere, though jolly and often humorous, tends to be critical. People listen intently, and are quickly shushed if they talk or make noise during the sets. Socialising is done in the interval and after the gig. Although both venues have bars, drink is not as central an aspect of the folk club setting as it is at sessions, where tables are strewn with glasses. Equally, the division between performer and audience is far more apparent, although audiences can sing along with choruses and sometimes banter with the performers.

Folk club attendance varies between individuals. Some people go every week and others attend only to see particular, favourite performers. The Edinburgh folk clubs provide audiences with the chance to see top professional acts in much smaller and more intimate venues than they might otherwise perform in. Likewise, at folk clubs, the performers drink and mingle with their audiences during the interval rather than retreating to the privacy of back-stage as they would at a more formal concert. Also, folk clubs allow leeway for the audience to influence the performance, to make requests and to respond more immediately to the performers’ jokes and stories. There is a sense that this type of performance is far more intimate than the larger concerts, where the performers are removed to a distant stage.

However, some session-goers I know are frustrated by the clubs’ emphasis on professional performance and bemoan the passing of the more informal sing-around

nights. There is a relatively common perception, particularly among some session instrumentalists, that the folk clubs are snobbish and that they treat the music too seriously. However, as is the case with any performance, the atmosphere within the clubs varies immensely depending upon the performers themselves. Some performers are themselves serious and their audiences respond accordingly. Others infuse the gigs with a contagious sense of humour. In Edinburgh, the folk clubs could not likely survive financially without attracting the well-known performers, largely because other singers and players find outlets at the large number of sessions in the city.

### *Ceilidhs*

In any given week, one can find a handful of ceilidh dances in Edinburgh, and here I would ask the reader to recall the descriptions at the beginning of this thesis. These range from weekly or bi-weekly ones at the Assembly Rooms or the Caledonian Brewery to smaller ones held in church halls or community centres, often as fund-raisers for various special interest groups. University clubs and societies, likewise, hold ceilidhs at the students' union. They have become one of the most successful modes of fund-raising for groups, nearly always guaranteed to draw a crowd. The ceilidhs at the Assembly Rooms and at the university always draw tourists and groups of foreign students, keen to get a taste of this "uniquely Scottish" activity; as with the pub sessions, it is easy for people to gain the impression that ceilidhs have been continuing in this form since time immemorial.

Indeed, Edinburgh ceilidhs are yet another aspect of the modern folk revival, although they also draw substantially upon the popular Scottish country dance traditions which are often berated by people embarrassed by tartanry. Like the other aspects of the scene, they promote themselves as contemporary interpretations of an ever-changing cultural tradition that maintains strong symbolic links with the imagined community of the nation. It has, for example, become more popular to have ceilidh dancing at weddings in Scotland, as it has for men to wear kilts at weddings; here we can see another example of the ways in which symbols of Scottishness are incorporated into other important aspects of life.

In many respects, the ceilidh 'scene' is somewhat separate from the other parts of the Edinburgh folk scene (although this is often less the case in other parts of the country, where singers and individual players will also gain a stage at ceilidhs). Ceilidhs are more popular (in a demographic sense) and seem to appeal to a broader spectrum of people than sessions, and certainly than folk clubs. Ceilidh-goers range from those serious dancers (the ones with the towels and mineral water mentioned in the introduction) who appear at nearly every ceilidh that happens to those who go to support their particular group or on very occasional social occasions. Some people use ceilidhs as chances to dress up in skirts and kilts, and others come in jeans and tee-shirts; often the dancers are dressed much more formally than the band members. Kilts, particularly worn with hiking boots rather than brogues, have become increasingly popular ceilidh dress in the last three or four years.

Ceilidhs are often more accessible to a wider population than sessions or folk clubs for a number of reasons. They are child and teenager-friendly, and often appeal

to people who for whatever reason are not comfortable in smoky pubs. I have also met a number of people who go to ceilidhs for the dancing but do not necessarily like traditional music in other contexts; they would not buy recordings of it or seek it out in other venues. On the other hand, most of the traditional music players and singers I know will go to ceilidhs more or less frequently.

Ceilidhs are more “involving” than the other types of musical performance. While integrating oneself into a session makes musical and social requirements, dancing at ceilidhs is generally simply a matter of finding a partner and being able to stumble along. Most ceilidh bands “call” the dances, or walk the dancers through the steps first. Some bands do not call the more popular dances, such as the “Gay Gordons” or the “Dashing White Sergeant”, but they are easy enough to pick up and follow along with. I used to frequent a pub in Berkeley, California, which held a weekly Irish ceili dancing night. They would run a class first, and then the dancing session, which would be divided into “dances for everyone” and “dances for those who know how”. Stumbling along wasn’t permitted. I have never been to a ceilidh in Edinburgh which prevents newcomers from joining in on every dance; it is generally simply left up to the people who do know what they are doing to guide the others through.

Ceilidh dancing, for most people, is far less obviously a “performance” than is, for example, playing in a session. Although I would argue that this sort of social dancing is a performance, there is far less expectation that the performers are specialists of some sort. Thus, there is less emphasis on “quality of performance” and far more on the “just doing it” side of things. One may go to sessions to watch

and listen, but most people who go to ceilidhs will make the effort to dance at least some of the dances. In between, they socialise with friends but likely do not seriously “watch” the dancing. Particularly energetic dancers make the point of doing all of them. There is an elderly man who appears frequently at Edinburgh ceilidhs. Whether he comes alone or not, I do not know, but he asks as many of the young women in the room up as he can and somehow manages to be involved in nearly every dance. He does not seem to tire and hardly appears to break a sweat.

Ceilidh bands are also relatively numerous in Edinburgh. Bands are diverse; some are experimental and innovative with the music and others concentrate upon what is described as a more “traditional” dance band sound with the piano accordion dominating. Playing in a ceilidh band does not necessarily require the same level of musical accomplishment as does “making it” in other parts of the contemporary folk scene; one is less obliged to give the listeners something new and musically virtuosic than to provide solid, energetic music for dancing. An ability to encourage the dancers onto the floor and call the dances with humour and enthusiasm is also essential in the making of a good ceilidh band. Band members are often semi-professional musicians who also have daytime jobs, although some are full-time professionals who either concentrate entirely on ceilidh playing or participate in other sorts of folk performance as well.

Most Edinburgh ceilidhs are informal affairs, and the emphasis is placed far more heavily upon having fun than it is upon proper style and protocol in dancing. In this respect, they differ from the dancing which happens at Scottish country dance clubs and organisations, which place a greater deal of weight upon “correct” steps



and styles. This difference sometimes brings their members into conflict with other dancers they may meet at ceilidhs. In one instance, one of my female friends was chastised by a country dance aficionado for holding his arm incorrectly when they spun. I could see him picking her hand off his arm and replacing it in a different position, and shaking his head as she stomped through the dance in her Doctor Marten boots. *"Where's the fun in that?"* she puffed as she sat down again at the end, *"What's the point of taking dancing too seriously. Doesn't that defeat the purpose?"* The conflict between doing things "correctly" and just having fun arises occasionally in the folk scene, particularly when young, experimentally minded people clash with so-called traditionalists.

The most popular types of folk performance in Edinburgh have been roughly outlined above. As indicated previously, some people remain entirely within one of the circles, for example singing sessions. They may be well known, both as individuals and for the material they perform, within that circle but unknown to people who move in other parts of the folk scene. Other people move more freely between the various sorts of performance and become well known to most people in the Edinburgh folk scene more generally. Sessions, folk club performances and ceilidhs are, of course, social events as well as musical ones; they are opportunities to catch up with friends, to joke and gossip, and for regular participants, part of the weekly routine of life.

Furthermore, these musical performances are implicated in the performers' and listeners' changing ideas about Scottish culture, identity and politics. They are

stages upon which musical aspects of national culture are brought to life and subjected to debate. Leaving ethnography temporarily aside, the following chapter provides a historical outline of Scottish nationalism in the twentieth century and the ways in which the folk revival has arisen in relation with it.

#### **IV: The Folk revival and contemporary Scottish nationalism**

The performances described in the previous chapter are situated temporally as well as geographically. As I argue throughout the thesis, contemporary Scottish folk musical performance is not a *result* of a coherent nationalist movement. It has, however, some fundamental historical links with the changing political attitudes of the past century, and these shall be outlined in the present chapter.

It is not unusual to propose that a folk revival is related to nationalism; it is recognised by most commentators on nineteenth and twentieth century nationalisms that folk cultural forms such as music and dance have been used in order to create senses of continuous national roots and identity. In this sense, folk revivals and nationalist movements are both seen to be inherently conservative. However, we should not equate the performance of traditional music to an exclusionary and right wing nationalism automatically. Slobin reminds us that the power of music lies not in its ability to convey a specific message but, rather, in its ambiguity:

Music's social and cultural role is always that of the shape-changer, if not trickster... While music will obligingly serve to animate marching men or Young Pioneers, it also anchors individual memory and group consciousness, placing them out of the reach of the state. In the most regulated of performative moments, no one can account for the multitude of meanings, responses and attachments each individual is bringing to the experience...(1996; 4).

Scottish folk traditional music has *not*, largely, been incorporated into an explicit party-political vision of nationalism. In campaigning prior to the recent Scottish parliamentary election, the SNP used songs by the singer/songwriter Dougie Maclean, well known for his gentle but often highly charged lyrics about Scottish

land and history. However, this is more the exception than the norm, largely, I would argue, because most of the performers themselves do not wish to employ their music (or themselves) in such a manner. Although nearly every musician I know agrees that the music both carries and expresses aspects of Scottish history, culture and political ambition, there is by no means a uniform vision of what these are or should be. Music, in other words, opens debate rather than stifles it.

Likewise, it is equally inaccurate to regard the Scottish folk revival as the quest for a lost Golden Age. I regard the contemporary Scottish folk scene to be a product of and response to current social and political trends in Scotland, Britain and indeed the “global” community. While it is true to say that much folk music deals either lyrically or contextually with social memory and the performers’ ideas about history, some previous observers of the folk scene have mistaken this concern with history for a rather less critical sort of nostalgia. For example, Olson writes:

Music and song enable the Scots to *escape* from their present back to their mythical past, for most Scottish music evokes a strong sense of nostalgia--especially Jacobite songs... The Lowland Scots and exiled Scots guard, treasure and preserve this nostalgic past, despite recent research into Scottish history which has demolished or significantly altered the romantic perception of events such as the 1745 rebellion or of great figures such as Bonnie Prince Charlie or Robert Burns. Basically it must be said that these Scots don’t want to know, for their nostalgia is for a past, a history which gives them a sense of pride, identity, and even of present-day purpose. It is of crucial importance to them (1991; 141).

As well as being a sweeping generalisation about “the” Scots and “their” past, this statement clashes discordantly with the actions and ambitions of the great majority of folk performers I know: by and large, people who are relatively knowledgeable of current Scottish historiography. Indeed, most of my musical friends would prefer to help deconstruct romantic images of the 1745 uprising (or other such events), rather

than reify them. It should perhaps be said, also, that although Jacobite songs are performed, they are not currently tremendously popular among singers in Edinburgh.

Thus, rather than denying modernity, the musicians and singers are offering an alternative definition of it by drawing upon local and historical traditions and upon a belief in the continuing ability of music to carry those traditions through time. They are insisting, in other words, that modernity need not be seen as a comprehensive break with the past and indeed that certain aspects of past cultural tradition are worth bringing forward. To say this is not to deny or discredit inventions and innovations that take place within these traditions all the time.

It is crucial to understand, then, that both the musical events and the political ones are links in a historical chain, neither independent occurrences nor finalised products but ones contingent upon an ongoing process of political and social change. Likewise, the roots of the folk revival lie in the political processes that have unfolded in Scotland and Britain more widely, but also in processes of political and cultural change that have occurred elsewhere: namely the United States and Ireland. The following section will document the most important developments in twentieth century Scottish nationalism.<sup>1</sup> This will be followed by a historical outline of the folk revival itself.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive history than I can provide here, see Brand, 1978: *The national movement in Scotland*; Harvie, 1981: *No gods and precious few heroes: Scotland since 1914*; Macartney's essay entitled "Recent and current developments in Scottish Politics", published in P. Zenzinger (ed.) 1989; and Nairn's 1997 re-examination of Scottish nationalism in *Faces of nationalism: Janus revisited*.

## **Scottish nationalism and cultural revival in the twentieth century**

Twentieth century Scottish nationalism is not a singular movement but rather extends to include a variety of ambitions (most notably, home rule versus independence), opinions and expressions. It is perhaps easier to define it by what it is generally agreed *not* to be: romantic. Although Scotland was both a major subject and producer of romanticism (and of one of its most profoundly influential figures: Sir Walter Scott), it did not see a significant romantically-based nationalism develop in the nineteenth century. Barring a handful of turn-of-the-century Celtic Revivalists who looked to a semi-mythical Celtic past as the solution to the ills of industrialisation, Scottish nationalism did not become a significant political trend until after the First World War.

Nairn, whose work in *The break-up of Britain* (1977) has profoundly influenced most subsequent writings on Scottish nationalism, argued that Scotland's failure to develop a national political consciousness in the nineteenth century led to the formation of an almost pathologically split-consciousness<sup>2</sup>. *Scotland* continued to exist as a romantically imagined entity but lacked the will or capability to form, out of that imagining, a modern, functional state. It was, in Nairn's eyes,

...a nationality which resigned statehood but preserved an extraordinary amount of the institutional and psychological baggage normally associated with independence--a decapitated national state, as it were, rather than an ordinary 'assimilated' nationality (1977; 129).

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<sup>2</sup> He borrows heavily from MacDiarmid here, who employed the term "Caledonian antiszygism" to diagnose this perceived propensity among Scottish thinkers to alternate between dour pessimism in terms of the present and flights of romantic fancy in terms of the past. Although popularised by MacDiarmid, the term was originally used by G. Gregory Smith in his 1919 *Scottish literature: character and influence*. (Nairn 1977; 150).

Brand (1978), similarly, attributes this lack of nineteenth century nationalism to the fact that the 1707 Treaty of Union left intact the Scottish education system, the Kirk of Scotland, and the legal system. As a result, many of the eighteenth century élites retained most of their power after the Union. Combined with the growing position of the British Empire as the major world power and the promise of prosperity this brought to Scottish as well as English merchants, the men of power in the early to mid-eighteenth century stood to gain economically as part of the Union. As McCrone (1998; 130-131. See also Colley 1992) highlights, Scotland remained a civil society after 1707 and the lives of ordinary people probably did not change all that much with the Union. The creation of Great Britain did not stamp out Scottishness, but did create a kind of “state identity” which “...sat lightly on top of the constituent nations...”(McCrone 1998; 130). In other words, Britishness was and still is, for many people, a real identity that does not *necessarily* assume a denial of Scottishness, Welshness, or for that matter, Englishness. At the same time, however, many intellectuals of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, David Hume most significantly, saw Scottish interests and Scottish accents as trappings of the provinciality they thought to be detrimental to modern civilisation.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Scotland shared in both the economic successes of the Empire and in the mixed blessings of the Industrial Revolution. Glasgow and the area surrounding the Clyde was one of the most profoundly and rapidly industrialised parts of Britain, as a massive shipbuilding industry was built up around the river and the iron and coal mines. However, this industrialisation brought with it a population fleeing famine and poverty in both the Highlands and Ireland,

and led to a huge increase in urban population density and decline in standard of living.

From the 1850's onward, political calls for Home Rule in Scotland, as in Ireland, became more common in response to increasing economic hardship in both countries. The Highland clearances (and those in other rural areas, such as the Borders and the south-west) and famine, which led to widespread rural depopulation and with it a decline in Gaelic language and cultural forms, became one of the major issues for Home Rule movement of this time. In both Ireland and Scotland, the question of home rule was intricately tied in with calls for reform of the feudal laws regarding rural land tenure and ownership (Jedrej & Nuttall 1996, Morton 1996, Wightman 1996). However, in Scotland, these calls never spilled over significantly into popular nationalist sentiment. In large part, the lowland Scottish bourgeoisie still saw itself to be most safely aligned with a British union.

### *Post-war: MacDiarmid's legacy*

The First World War marks a watershed in Scottish political sentiment, as it does throughout modern European social and political history. Nineteenth century Celtic-revivalist or land reform-based calls for Home Rule came to a more or less abrupt halt in Scotland. As Harvie writes, "When the war ended, the consciousness of Scotland changed"(1989; 18). The industrial economy, which was centred so firmly on Clydeside shipbuilding and booming during the war itself, now began to collapse and unemployment soared to nearly twenty percent.



It was in the 1920's, then, that the first real stirrings of nationalism were heard in Scotland. The National Party of Scotland was founded in 1928, and in 1934 it was amalgamated with the slightly less radical Scottish Party in order to become the Scottish National Party, or SNP (Harvie 1989; 21). Rather than turning to the romance of myth and history, these nationalists took up the banner of socialism and based their arguments on the notion that Scottish independence would bring an *economic* rather than ethnic revolution. As Brand writes, "...the picture of the twentieth century Scottish nationalist as the romantic crypto-Jacobite could not be further from the truth"(1978; 16).

The major figures in this early movement, which did not attract more than between one and two percent of an electorate which was profoundly divided along class lines, were literary ones, most notably the poet Hugh MacDiarmid.

MacDiarmid (the pen name of Christopher Grieve) was a problematic character who was at once a self-declared communist and, undeniably, a literary élitist. He looked to the Glaswegian socialist and republican, John Maclean, to the Edinburgh-born Irish republican James Connolly, and also to the Russian Revolution, for political inspiration (Riach 1992; xvi, Harvie 1993; 130) and to the various dialects of Lowland Scots, or Lallans, for poetic and cultural inspiration. He argued strongly against the nostalgia of the Romantic and Kailyard<sup>3</sup> genres, and that Lallans should be promoted as the viable literary language of Scotland, rather than as mere local dialect. MacDiarmid's poetry merged words and expressions from many

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<sup>3</sup> The Kailyard (literally meaning cabbage patch) genre of Scottish literature, popular at the turn of the century, was concerned with the portrayal of rural or village life and the promotion of wholesome, Presbyterian ethics, and the opposition to modernism. Subsequently, it has often been attacked by

varieties of Scots into a language that was uniquely his own. What it did not do, however, was represent the ways in which anyone *actually* spoke. Thus, although MacDiarmid has been hailed as the founder of the Scots revival and the literary renaissance, it cannot really be said that he perpetuated the spoken language/s of the population, which he saw as debased forms of Anglicised Scots (Brand 1978). As has been mentioned earlier, he had little faith in the ability of existing folk poetry and song, which could be thought of as a more populist form of expression, to carry the language into the future.

Two contemporaries of MacDiarmid, novelist Lewis Grassie Gibbon and poet Edwin Muir, are also major contributors to the Scottish literary renaissance of the twenties and thirties. Although they both promoted an awareness of Scottish political, economic, and cultural affairs, they were less outspokenly Nationalist (with a large N) than MacDiarmid. Muir incurred the not inconsiderable wrath of MacDiarmid when he argued, in the mid 1930's, that there could be no real, populist revival of Scots language and that Scotland would remain without a central national identity unless united by a common language: English (Muir 1982). Likewise, Lewis Grassie Gibbon (aka James Leslie Mitchell) also came into conflict with MacDiarmid. Although MacDiarmid managed to fuse his nationalism with an eccentric variety of socialism, Grassie Gibbon saw socialism, rather than nationalism, as a pragmatic necessity (Brand 1978; 101). In 1934, he famously wrote:

If it came, as it may come, to some fantastic choice of a free and independent Scotland, a centre of culture, a bright flame of artistic and scientific achievement, or providing elementary decencies of food and shelter to the submerged proletariat of Glasgow and Scotland, I at least would have no

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political and literary critics for creating a parochial, backward representation of Scotland (Watson 1984).

doubt as to on which side of the battle I would range myself. For the cleansing of that horror, if cleanse it they could, I would welcome the English sovereignty over Scotland until the end of time. I would welcome the end of Braid Scots and Gaelic, our culture, our history, our nationhood under the heels of a Chinese army of occupation if it could cleanse the Glasgow slums (1934; reprinted in *ibid.* 1978; 101-102),

to which MacDiarmid infamously replied, "I on the other hand would sacrifice a million people any day for one immortal lyric. I am a scientific socialist. I have no use whatever for emotional humanism" (quoted by Harvie 1989; 24). Despite linguistic and poetic differences, the writers of the literary renaissance were bound by a common sense that Scotland continued to live in cultural expression and it was through this expression that a political identity might be reborn.

By the mid-1930's, the depression and renewed stirrings of war in Europe caused the budding political Nationalist movement to slide again into obscurity, where it remained until the 1950's. However, the Scottish literary renaissance that had occurred alongside it had sparked a more important and profound process. It attracted the attention of Scottish journalists and intellectual commentators and drew their attention powerfully away from the mecca of London towards Scotland, and promoted a spreading sense that Scottish artistic and expressive forms were legitimate and modern rather than simply provincial. Harvie (*ibid.*) writes that the literary renaissance helped to mobilise the subsequent generation of intellectuals to become aware of a sense of Scottishness in terms of their own work. Thus, although the political nationalism of the 1920's and early 1930's did not provide the revolutionary upheaval MacDiarmid would have wished for, a literary, linguistic, and cultural nationalism that was, crucially, anti-romantic, began to work its way slowly into the consciousnesses of the population.

During and immediately following the Second World War, pressing nationalist sentiments were of little immediate concern to either politicians or the majority of the public. The Conservative government of 1951 to 1964 was strongly anti-devolution, as was the opposing Labour party. During this time less than one percent of the electorate followed the SNP.

However, beginning in the early fifties, a number of events and trends continued to perpetuate the quietly growing feelings of cultural nationalism among many Scots. In 1949, John MacCormick, perhaps Scotland's most outspoken nationalist at that time (though himself no longer a member of the SNP), organised a petition, or Covenant as it soon came to be called, which called for the establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament. It is pointed out by Harvie (1993; 107), among others, that the Covenant gathered some two million signatures, although as Brand (1978; 247) argues, the signatures were never counted properly and this number is an estimate. Perhaps oddly in the light of this apparently widespread support, the general election of 1951 revealed no organised call for either Scottish home rule or independence.

On Christmas Day, 1950, four nationalist students stole the Stone of Destiny (the stone on which the medieval Scottish kings had been crowned until it was taken to London by Edward I in 1297) from Westminster Abbey and managed to smuggle it to Glasgow. This event, which Brand describes as "...a romp which was hugely enjoyed by the vast majority of Scots..." (1978; 118), inspired a wave of political songs, written in Scots to familiar melodies, which are often hailed as some of the first of the contemporary folk song revival. These songs reached beyond the

immediate Stone episode and illustrate an irreverence and the beginnings of a challenge to the established British order:

So if ye ever come on a Stane wi' a ring  
Just sit yuirself doon an' proclaim yuirself King,  
For there's nane wuid be able tae challenge yuir claim  
That ye'd croont yuirself King on the Destiny Stane (John McEvoy, "The Wee Magic Stane).

Likewise, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1952 inspired a similar wave of songs, protesting the fact that she was crowned Elizabeth II despite the fact that Elizabeth I had been Queen of England before the Union of Crowns in 1603.

Of longer lasting importance, certainly, were the break-up of the British Empire and the early stages of European integration. The changing balance of power between Britain and the rest of the world was having an effect upon the ways in which the Scottish population regarded its own position within Britain. Mitchell writes, "It was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the myth of British 'Greatness'..."(1996; 94).

The spread of television, and particularly the founding of Scottish Television in 1956, also contributed to the Scottish population's growing desire to cultivate its own modes of expression and communication. Both STV and increasingly, BBC Scotland, began to allow broadcasters to speak in Scottish accents rather than received pronunciation. Scottish music and other artistic forms, likewise, were suddenly made far more accessible to a broader Scottish audience than simply the poetry-reading intellectuals. As will be discussed in the next section, the early fifties also saw the beginning of the Edinburgh International Festival and its more populist spin-offs.

Between 1964 and 1974, support for the SNP went from 2.4 percent of the electorate to 30.4 percent (*ibid*; 4), attracting the younger generations in particularly large numbers. This jump is generally attributed to two processes: first, the growing distrust of and disillusionment with many existing social hierarchies, which occurred throughout Europe and North America at that time; and secondly the culmination of what had already been half a century's worth of increasingly pro-Scots cultural expression. One factor which is commonly argued to be a major trigger for the increase of nationalism in the early seventies is the discovery of North Sea oil, which fuelled hopes of a major money-making industry for the Scottish economy. Independence, so it would seem, was now thought to be economically viable. However, with Brand I believe that the seeds of nationalist sentiment had already been sown by the cultural changes:

The crucial connection seems to have been forged by a gradual restructuring of the political consciousness of the Scottish electorate in such a way that they began to perceive themselves as Scots in terms of their political interests rather than as, for example, members of the working class (*ibid*.; 301).

Not all pro-independence or home rule sentiment manifested (nor does it currently manifest) itself in support for the SNP, however. During the mid-1960's, the Labour Party began to actively consider the prospect of parliamentary devolution in response to this now increasingly obvious public sentiment. My discussion of nationalism incorporates calls for complete independence, calls for devolution, as well as the cultural nationalisms that did not necessarily manifest themselves in direct political action.

The culmination of the growth of nationalism in the sixties and seventies was the referendum on devolution of 1 March 1979. "*In 1979*," singer Dick Gaughan

often told his audiences before the 1997 referendum, “*we voted for a Scottish Parliament. We’re still waiting for it.*” Success of the referendum was dependent upon the so-called 40 percent rule, which required 40 percent of the entire electorate to vote in favour. Poor turnout resulted in defeat for the referendum which did, in fact, receive nearly 52 percent of the actual vote (Lynch 1992; 447). A significant contributing factor to this failure was that the two dominant pro-change parties, Labour and the SNP, split the vote between those who wanted the 1978/9 version of devolution and those who preferred to hold out for a more drastic change.

### *Tory days and devolution dreams*

“I was quite content to be British until Thatcher came along.”  
Ian Brown, Edinburgh

As Lynch writes “Devolution, despite the reverse suffered in 1979, did not as a result go away. The mistake of the next government was to assume that it had.” Thatcher’s social and economic policies in the face of de-industrialisation and rising unemployment were unpopular throughout working class Britain. However, her attitude that pro-devolutionary attitudes were detrimental to a Union which must be preserved at all costs added insult to injury north of the Border (Mitchell 1996; 98). Her policies hit hard, likewise, at a Lowland cultural identity which was intricately linked to these hard-hit industries:

... Thatcherite ideological revulsion of anything representative of the public sector or of collectivism *per se*, riled the Scots... Here one needs to consider that much of Scotland’s conceptual and symbolic shape had for several *generations* become deeply inter-woven with the presence of large-scale nationalised industries and with a state which employed 40 percent of its citizens—the highest of the UK regions... (Macleod 1998; 856).



Although support for the SNP was low in the early to mid 1980's, Harvie notes that the Scottish intelligentsia in that time took up a generally nationalist stance, and that "...the revival in painting, film, and the novel, in the poetry library movement and in drama--staged and televised--did much to keep national identity in being..."(1989; 11).

By the beginning of the nineties, then, it was commonly believed in Scotland that the Tories were being kept in power by "middle England" and were not representative of more than a tiny fraction of Scottish political or social sentiment. The introduction of the poll tax in 1990, a year earlier than it was established in England and Wales added fuel to this belief, as did the unexpected Conservative victory in 1992. Lynch writes, concluding his epic history of Scotland: "Yet, if Scotland manages twice in the 1990's to evade some form of Home Rule it will be a remarkable escape story. As Oscar Wilde said of the death of Little Nell, the historian would then need a heart of stone not to laugh" (1992; 449).

It happened, as I have said, in 1997. It is possible to see the 1997 vote for devolution as a perhaps inevitable step in a process that has been unfolding for nearly a century. With Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and the SNP this time united in their campaign for the parliament, the "debacle" of 1979 would not be repeated. However, once the initial excitement died down, it has become politics as usual. Support for the SNP has, for the first time in the party's history, rivalled that for ("new") Labour, which many people now see to be no further left, or politically progressive than the Conservatives.



In a sense, the word *nationalism* has been used throughout this discussion as a convenience rather than as a simple description of what has really occurred. Rather, what has happened has been a gradual merging of a growing cultural sense of Scottishness (without, of course, any solid identifiable definition) with a political process (Brand 1978, McCreadie 1991). Perhaps a better description of what has occurred in Scotland is a quest for cultural and political self-determination (though not *necessarily* complete independence); indeed, the phrase “self-determination” rises more frequently to the lips of the people I know than does nationalism. However, as I wrote in the introduction, I (like Brand, 1978) see nationalism to encompass a range of socio-political activities and opinions and do not confine it simply to those relating to complete independence. I use the word nationalism, then, because this drive for self-determination has been formulated entirely within the context of a Scottish nation which exists, unquestionably, in the minds and imaginations of the population.

It perhaps clarifies matters to explain that this view of contemporary Scottish nationalism roughly coincides with the way in which McCrone (1998a; 129) outlines the sub-category of “neo-nationalism”. McCrone argues that neo-nationalisms can be identified for, among other characteristics, their “...complex relationship between cultural nationalism and political nationalism”, the fact that the nationalism is more “civic” than “ethnic” (or, in McCrone’s words, the emphasis is more upon shared residence than shared blood), and because there is often ambiguity about the ultimate aims (i.e. devolution versus independence).

Similarly, discussion of Scotland's position within the United Kingdom since 1707 frequently revolves around concepts of civil society and civic nationalism. Roughly defined, civil society refers to those aspects of social life which are outside direct jurisdiction or control of the state, including domestic, economic and cultural spheres (*ibid*; 88). It must be acknowledged, of course, that civil society and state are not always easily delineated and do exert mutual influence upon each other. Scotland continued to exist after 1707 as a civil society; the union of state-level identity must not be seen as the dissolution of Scotland's civic national identity (*ibid.*, Colley 1992). Twentieth century Scottish nationalism has been largely civic, placing emphasis upon cultural expression and the recognition of political identity rather than necessarily demanding either some sort of ethnic revolution or outright independence. As McCrone points out (1998a; 132-133), this has largely changed in the last decade as the demands for devolution have finally begun to manifest themselves in widespread electoral results. This change can be seen as the result of an increasing sense, among many Scots, that the centralising tendencies of the British state have proved damaging to Scottish civil society, both economically and culturally.

### **The Folk Revival**

“We rapidly came to realise that by embarking on the study and collection of folk material we were engaged, willy-nilly, in a political act.”

Hamish Henderson

This section will examine the rise of the folk revival itself, drawing out cultural connections with growth of nationalism. The folk ‘revival’ to which most

people within the scene now refer began in earnest in the early 1950's and is intricately (though in some ways indirectly) linked with the processes detailed above. It is seen as part of the growing confidence in Scottish cultural forms that has accompanied the drive for self determination; despite MacDiarmid's own opinions about folk song, this revival was certainly inspired in many ways by what he and his contemporaries sought to do. However, it also has roots in the United States, Ireland and England, which have also experienced revivals, of sorts, of folk music. Most folk musicians and singers I know are aware of this musical history and it enters into their discourse frequently. What is more, they often make the attempt to verbally link themselves with outstanding figures in this history through stories of who they have performed with or learned music from. One can see these stories as something of the creation of an artistic genealogical tree, through which the music is passed on through the generations.

*Looking back: folk revival at the turn of the century*

“There was never ane o my sangs prentit till ye prentit them yoursel’, and ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singing and no for readin: but ye hae broken the charm noo, and they’ll never be sung mair.”  
Margaret Laidlaw (mother of James Hogg) to Sir Walter Scott. Cited by Hamish Henderson, 1992.

However, before outlining contemporary developments, I should go further back and briefly discuss the Victorian and turn of the century folk revival which both gave rise to, and differs greatly from, revival of more recent years. It would be misleading to portray the efforts folklorists and collectors of the turn of the century and those of people in later years as entirely unrelated; indeed they are not.

Furthermore, in a deconstructionist, post-Nairn (1977) and Trevor-Roper (1983) climate, it is all too easy to condemn the early revivalists as backward-looking, essentialist, and anti-realist romantics (as we also condemn anthropologists of that era for their similar efforts).

This early revival, which with romanticism as a whole should be seen as a product of the industrial revolution and the immense and traumatic social changes this brought, was largely the result of work by a handful of song collectors and folklore scholars, most notably Francis James Child (1825-1896) and Cecil Sharp (1859-1924). Sharp collected songs primarily from rural English singers while Child ranged throughout Britain and the United States, gathering ballads that were known in both places. Child's collection, *The English and Scottish popular ballads* (1882-98) is still widely considered within the folk scene to be perhaps the definitive collection of British ballads (and their North American manifestations), often described by people within the scene as 'Child ballads' (Cheesman and Rieuwerts 1997; 9).

Roughly contemporaneously with Child and Sharp, Gavin Greig and James Duncan collected a vast array of songs in Aberdeenshire, a collection which rivals those of the better-known men. Unlike Sharp, who published only the songs which coincided with his narrow vision of rural English folk-life, Greig and Duncan concluded that their collection *did not* reflect any codified body of Scots song or coherent Scottish folk life (Olson 1987; 40). Likewise, their songs differed profoundly from the pseudo-Jacobite and music hall songs which had come, in a large body of popular imagination, to exemplify Scottish "national" song (*ibid.*).

Both men died prematurely and the collection was handed over to another collector, William Walker. Upon examination of the songs, Walker determined that the majority of them did not fit Child's dominant definitions of "national" folk song. The only songs to be published out of the collection of well over 3,000 songs were those which were already known as Child ballads (*ibid*: 43). The Greig-Duncan collection remained relatively hidden in the library at the University of Aberdeen until it at last began to be published, in multiple volumes, in the early 1980's. As a result, many of the songs within the Greig-Duncan collection have remained out of circulation within folk revival circles until recent years.

Here another connection exists: that between this early revival and the folklore studies to which it gave birth, and social anthropology. The rural, and largely illiterate, singers who became sources for Sharp and his colleagues can be seen as the British versions of the early anthropologists' non-European "natives". In her comprehensive history of this Victorian folk revival, *The imagined village*, Georgina Boyes (1993) points out, that Sharp and his contemporaries regarded themselves as the rescuers of a non-literary folk tradition that was being rapidly broken down by the onward tide of industrialisation (see also Bohlman 1988). They believed that without intellectual intervention, the songs and therefore the essence of British rural life, would be lost forever. Like their anthropological colleagues, their obsession was with documenting what had, until that point, been undocumented, but instead of collecting "social facts" about the people, they collected songs. In this respect, their activities were largely conservative in that they aimed to preserve an outdated way of life, not through practice or context but through cultural "product".

Yet, using a metaphor common in academic discussions of cultural nationalism, Boyes points out that this enterprise was decidedly Janus-faced. These early revivalists did not simply want to collect songs but sought also to reincorporate the folk song and dance traditions into British life (*ibid.*; 4). This was a project motivated by the emerging modern nationalisms, found not only in Britain but across Europe: “Folk dances and songs and the processes for their regeneration offered the content and means for actualising ‘Merrie England’--a potent symbol for a range of contemporary ideological positions...”(*ibid.*; 65). These ideological positions located English (or whichever other) national identity in a rural peasant life which no longer existed, if it ever had, and in a roughly defined, anonymous body of “folk” who carried ‘culture’ less as purposeful agents in the world than as vessels. Once in the hands of educated individuals, the songs and dances could then be used both to reassert a sense of old-fashioned rural nationalism among the élites and “improve” the new urban proletariat by making them aware of their rural “folk” roots. Cieraad writes:

The élite, in its wish to identify with ‘folk’ values, marginalises the city proletariat as uncultured masses; but by the same token it initialises a civilising mission amongst that selfsame proletariat. This mission proceeds by presenting to the urban masses an image of the moral ‘folk’ as an ideal to emulate (Cieraad, in Corbey & Leersen, eds. 1991; 26).

The collectors of this era rarely documented life histories of their sources, nor did they imagine that the relationship between the individual singer and the song was of any importance. The songs they collected were thus transformed from living, and thus fluid, cultural expressions into literary, and thus largely rigidified, artefacts. Furthermore, the songs were not written down in the vernacular language of their

sources but in the collectors' own standardised and educated English. The huge body of popular song that evolved within or as statement about the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation was generally not deemed appropriate material for collection (Cheesman & Rieuwerts 1997). Raymond Williams argues that Cecil Sharp's methods not only "falsified" the vision of rural England but actually contributed to hiding from sight the actualities and hardships of contemporary rural life (1973; 258). However, while we may question the methods and motives of the song collectors, it is likely true that without their efforts, hundreds of songs which are now frequently performed, would indeed have been lost.

The early years of the revival can also be seen as part of a process that began in the mid to late eighteenth century, with the beginnings of Romanticism, the new interest in ethnic or national origins and myths and the rise of European nation-states (Hobsbawm 1994). This process occurred throughout Europe, most notably perhaps in Germany through the efforts of men such as Goethe and Herder, who promoted the idea that "folk" ballads and lore, embodied "...the flesh and blood of true German history" and thus the essence of German-ness. (Schama 1995; 102).

In Britain, Scottish Highlanders became particular subject to Romantic interest. After the final Jacobite defeat in 1746, Romanticism began to achieve an amount of success in Scotland. Disarmed and stripped of their ability to be a legitimate threat to the political status quo, Gaels and Gaelic culture became subjects of intellectual and literary curiosity. For several centuries, Highlanders had been intellectually distinguished from Lowlanders and described very often as primitive or tribal and in need of civilising (Macdonald 1997); in the second half of the eighteenth



century their reputation as Britain's own noble savages became attractive to Lowland intellectual and touristic interest (*ibid*; see also Chapman 1978, Withers 1992). The man who is most often given credit for first popularising the "myth" of the Gaels is James Macpherson, himself originally a Highlander. In 1760, he published a work entitled *Fragments of ancient poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language*. Subsequently, he published two other books of similar nature: *Fingal: an ancient epic poem in six books* (1761) and *Temora: an ancient epic poem in eight books* (1763). All three of these texts, he claimed, were written by an ancient bard, Ossian, associated with the Irish Fenian legends, and illustrated, supposedly, the richness and essence of ancient Celtic Scotland.

Macpherson's works were immensely popular throughout Europe and as Sharon Macdonald points out (1997; 50), ancient literatures were quickly 'discovered or forged' for other so-called primitive peoples across Europe. It is now widely believed that Macpherson's books *were* forgeries or at least (and this may well be the case) very creative and authorial piecings together of a fragmentary scattering of poetry from many sources. Macpherson's legacy has largely been condemned by writers like Nairn (1977), Chapman (1978) and Withers (1992), who argue that "genuine Gaelic culture is ignored whilst largely fake Ossianic myths are feted by urbane society" (Withers 1992; 152).

Sir Walter Scott is the subject of even more debate and condemnation. Through his fictional writings, his folk-song collecting and his organisation of King



George IV's visit to Scotland in 1822<sup>4</sup>, Scott is often seen to be central in the creation of a Romantic national Scottish mythology. His interests in folk collecting and writing ultimately relied upon that same need to recapture a lost past, though a past which had been declawed through rapid economic, social and political upheaval and change. As Nairn writes:

On the side of nationality--all those aspects of civil society and its past which might be seen as peculiarly Scottish--this meant a curious sort of over-emphasis on history. A new, more deeply felt historical awareness had become universal. But in Scottish conditions it was to become positively obsessional. It is this emotional displacement which lent such furious energy to Scott's great, exemplary panoramas of the country's past. This gives them that intense, elegaic character at once so seductive and so frustrating. He evoked the past (especially a relatively recent past) more powerfully than anyone else; but part of this magic is the implication that it is a past we have, in certain vital ways, irreparably lost (1977; 151).

Yet, in the contemporary Edinburgh folk scene, neither Scott nor Macpherson is central to singers or instrumentalists' discourse, although one or two songs written or collected by Scott are somewhat popular among pub singers ("Bonnie Dundee" being the best example). A character who, on the other hand, *is* still particularly dominant is Robert Burns. Burns played a significant role in the folk writing and collecting process in the late eighteenth century, and is still a central figure, attracting both praise and scorn, in the Scottish folk scene. Like Scott, he both collected songs, wrote his own or pieced together existing fragments of lyric with tunes, romanticising the past to an extent. Yet, unlike Scott, Burns is today often interpreted as a culturally progressive figure who represented Scottish history in a way that gave individuals an agency and responsibility they never had in Scott's work (Donaldson 1988). Burns himself is interpreted in many ways and held up as a

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<sup>4</sup> When, it said, the king arrived in Edinburgh wearing a very short tartan kilt, thus triggering among

symbol of many conflicting ideals. For some people, he is a fighter for the rights of the common man, for others he is simply a romantic. For some, he is an objectionable philanderer and misogynist. For some he is an admirable nationalist and for others he is a pseudo-Jacobite. Some singers I know have repertoires dominated by Burns' songs; others categorically refuse to sing them.

This history enters frequently into singers' own conceptions of the folk revival and of aspects of nationality. One night at a singing session, a Scottish singer asked me if I'd read Boyes' book, *The imagined village*. Embarrassingly, I had not (yet), and he proceeded to give me a summary which then evolved into a group conversation about the differences between the English and Scottish folk scenes. Although the book deals primarily with the turn-of-the-century English revival, several of the singers present that night said they believed the contemporary English folk scene differed little from what Boyes described. One woman, who had recently returned to Edinburgh after having lived in London for several months, spoke about having been to a folk club there and watching a succession of people standing up and singing songs about "sheep-herding and rolling in the hay, with their fingers in their ears". People said they thought the English folk scene was still dominated by rural romanticism and that it fails to explore issues that "really matter to people"; what is more, they stressed equally that this was not the case in the Scottish folk scene.

Their conversation interested me, not because I believe it highlighted *actual* differences between the English and Scottish folk "scenes" (as coherent entities) but because it illustrates the extent to which the people I met incorporate music, and the

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the upper-classes a vogue for all things tartan.

uses of music, into their construction of national stereotypes. As the conversation continued, it shifted away from particular English folk singers onto “the English” in general; the English were old-fashioned and backward-looking, the English were out of touch with social and political reality. Furthermore, it exemplifies the ways in which a scholarly history of folk music and song is interpreted and politicised by the musicians and singers themselves and how it informs their constructions of national stereotypes.

Although several of my friends believed the early revivalist ideology to be still prevalent in England, things did begin to change in the inter-war years on both sides of the border. Attitudes toward the role of folk music in national society began to shift and to polarise as the aftermath of the First World War and the beginnings of depression made themselves felt. Although some revivalists still aligned themselves with the folklore scholarship and the formal institutions of the revival, namely Sharp’s English Folk Dance and Song Society, others began to challenge these institutions with the notion that musical expression should reflect social reality rather than idyll (Boyes 1993). In the 1930’s, socialism vied with right-wing nationalism for dominance in the revival. While some collectors saw folk or popular song as a working-class weapon in the class struggle, others, such as Rolf Gardiner, envisioned a return to an arcane, organic society in which folk song and dance became an essential tool for the encouragement of national strength and fertility (*ibid*). In this respect Gardner, who rejected Sharp’s more intellectual approach and sought to transform his ‘Morris Ring’ society into a kind of nationalist English fraternity, saw

music as a way to create a 'superior race' similar to that Hitler was using more violent means to create in Germany.

### *The revival in post-war and contemporary years*

It is, as I have said, misleading to treat the turn of the century folk revival and that which has been occurring since the middle of the century as two discrete processes, as is very often done by folk historians; ultimately this common portrayal exemplifies our intellectual predilection for bounded events and categories more than it does the actual convoluted state of affairs. Rather, it makes more sense to portray these revivals as an ongoing process marked by changes in social attitudes and punctuated by economic depression, war, and the profound social changes brought about by radio and, subsequently television.

The years immediately prior to, during, and following the second world war marked perhaps the most profound change in attitudes toward and treatment of folk music in Britain. It also saw the beginnings of a gap between the Scottish and English folk scenes with an increasing interest in Scottish national modes of expression and language adding a Scottish rather than British nationalist twist to the scene north of the border. Perhaps the most fundamental change was a shifting of attitude regarding who the music's performers and audiences should be. By this I mean both who they were in a literal sense and who they *aspired* to be in an ideological one. Sharp and his contemporaries were firmly established middle or upper-middle class intelligentsia with no desire to dissociate themselves from such a status; in their dancing and performance they made every effort, through language

and dress, to ensure that they were not mistaken for the working-class peasantry, whose music they were so fascinated with (*ibid.*; 112).

As socialist and republican oriented ideologies began to creep into and eventually came to dominate folk musical scenes, the collector/performers, who were still largely economically privileged individuals began to deny these powerful class distinctions and to affiliate themselves with a working-class identity. The rigid classifications of popular song into rural and thus traditional or authentic 'folk' song, urban work songs and contemporary ones written as social commentary became far less distinct. Along with this change of perspective came a methodological change in folk-song collection: the history and agency of the individual source or singer began to be recognised and prioritised rather than simply disregarded in an effort to document a song (Cheesman & Rieuwerts 1997).

Beginning with the labour movements of the 1920's and 1930's, Ailie Munro traces the history of the twentieth century folk revival in Scotland in her book, published first in 1984 as *The folk music revival in Scotland* and then re-released in 1996 under the title *The democratic muse*. The new title reflects the lasting (though changing) connection between music and politics and the new edition of the book incorporates the strengthening position of music within Scottish cultural nationalism. Munro's history, which also contains a chapter on the Gaelic revival by Morag MacLeod, is the most comprehensive existing account of this revival, although it overtly prioritises folk-song, to the detriment of the developments of instrumental music. It is worth outlining some of the main developments of the folk revival here.

Radio and the increased accessibility of recorded media profoundly influenced this process; individual voices could now be heard, with all of their individual characteristics and imperfections, as could regional accents and dialects. Broadcasts of folk songs, compiled on both sides of the Atlantic, not only of so-called traditional ballads but of songs based upon contemporary life, were the main inspirations for the new generation of folk singers (Munro 1996). These broadcasts, from Alistair Cooke's mid-1930's *I heard America Singing* to Ewan MacColl's famous *Radio Ballads* of the 1960's provided both the broadly socialist and humanist ideology and a new canon of songs for this changing musical scene.

Here we see the influence of the trans-Atlantic connection come to the fore. In the United States, the inter-war folk musical activities were dominated not just by revivalist efforts of the folklorists but by a handful of labour and union activists, often connected with the IWW (the International Workers of the World, often known as 'Wobblies') and the CIO, or Congress of Industrial Organisations, which was founded as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930's (*ibid.*). The names that came to the fore during this era have been central to both labour activism and the revival of folk and traditional music in the subsequent decades: Woodie Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Paul Robeson among others. Woodie Guthrie travelled throughout the States, gathering fuel for their songs about the experiences of migrant workers and dust bowl victims and popularising a left-wing agenda and realist vision of the rural US, rather than the rather arcane one Child and his collections in the Appalachians represented. The American labour and work songs were popular in Scotland in the inter-war and immediate post-war years, and Munro notes that

Scottish ones were not highly influential either in the folk scene or the nationalist movement until the 1950's (*ibid*; 24).

Woodie Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Burl Ives and Huddy Leadbetter (a.k.a. Leadbelly) are perhaps the most famous members of a group of singers called The Almanacs, who from the mid-thirties into the early forties, took an active part in musical pro-union and anti-war protests (*ibid.*; 14). Another member of the group, Alan Lomax, the son of the American folklorist and collector John Lomax, split his time between singing and folklore scholarship and research. In 1951, he arrived in Scotland, armed with a tape recorder and a commission from Columbia Records to compile a series of LP's on the "folk and primitive music" of the world (Henderson 1992; 16). Hamish Henderson, who was hired to assist Lomax in his collecting fieldwork in Scotland, believes this to have been one of the 'accidents' which truly kick-started the contemporary Scottish folk revival (one of the others is generally thought to be the "liberation" of the Stone of Destiny at the end of 1950).

In the same year, the Edinburgh Labour Festival Committee started the People's Festival as an alternative to the then four-year old Edinburgh Festival's high-cultural emphasis. Among other events, the People's Festival featured a ceilidh, recorded by Lomax, which brought together a large number of Scottish traditional singers:

What made this inaugural People's Festival ceilidh so important was the fact that this was the first time such a masterly group of authentic traditional musicians and ballad-singers from rural Scotland had sung together to a city audience; the result was a veritable cultural explosion, for a number of the 'folk' virtuosi of the future were present in the audience. It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that this powerful 'shot in the arm', given by veterans to the apprentice revival, was directly due to the far-sighted and



imaginative initiative by the Scottish labour and trades union movement (*ibid.*; 17).

Here we see the coming together of contemporary labour activists, folklorists, and traditional singers, and the growing realisation that they had much to learn from each other. The traditional singers who subsequently became famous in the scene were no longer solely the scholars of the earlier revival but were, in many cases from the urban or rural working classes or Travellers like Jeannie Robertson. In a sense Henderson replicates an older definition of “authenticity” in his description, but he makes the point that the nameless “sources” of the earlier revival were now becoming recognised as individual singers with great talent and knowledge. Their voices represented slices of Scottish society which had little other outlet for public expression; they also conveyed a wealth of local knowledge, storytelling, and language which was becoming increasingly recognised for its political potential. The People’s Festival was stopped after 1955, but following its example, folk clubs began to be established in Edinburgh and the city soon became a centre of the growing revival (Munro 1996; 32).

Throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s, overtly political protest songs were the mainstay of the Scottish revival, as they were on the other side of the Atlantic, commenting both upon worldly matters and those closer to home. Perhaps the most notable single event was the stationing of American Polaris submarines near Dunoon in the Clyde in 1961, which sparked a wave of protests and accompanying songs with anti-nuclear and anti-US imperialism messages. These types of issues continued to be influential both here and in the United States, as McCarthyism gave way to the Cold War and then to Vietnam, and singers continued to be leading voices



of resistance. At the same time, however, traditional song was also gaining greater appreciation, particularly under the influence of singer Ewan MacColl and his partner Peggy Seeger, Pete's younger sister. In Scotland, The Corries (who wrote and popularised "Flower of Scotland", which has subsequently come to be Scotland's unofficial national anthem) came onto the scene at around the same time, performing a combination of traditional and contemporary songs which became favourite 'pub' numbers in subsequent years.

However, Munro (*ibid*; 45) notes that by the mid-1960's, instrumental music was becoming increasingly popular in Ireland through the performances of bands such as The Dubliners, who accompanied their songs with "traditional" instruments such as the fiddle, whistle and tenor banjo. Another Irish band, The Chieftains, was even more instrumentally oriented. Munro (*ibid*; 46) points also to the increasing popularity of Fiddle and Accordion clubs in Scotland and to the growing number of young people learning the fiddle or pipes. Throughout the seventies and eighties, instrumental music became more and more popular, and on its heels came a dramatic increase in interest in ceilidh dancing. Instrumental music, much of it Irish, came to dominate pub sessions and the folk club-centred singing boom began to subside. Bands performing both song and instrumental music became the most successful mode of performance in the folk scene, replacing the individual singer or singer/guitarist.

### *The Irish influence and the instrumental revival*

The influences of Ireland, Irish music, and images of Irishness upon the Scottish folk scene should not be underestimated. In the late 1950's and early 60's, Irish bands like The Clancy Brothers and then The Dubliners came onto the scene, popularising what became, in many ways, a canon for many folk singers, not only in Ireland but also in Scotland, England and North America. Apart from these bands' own success, they influenced an up-coming generation of folk, country and rock performers, including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Van Morrison, and many others, particularly those coming out of Ireland in the 1980's and 1990's, like U2 and Sinéad O'Connor.

Songs popularised by The Clancy Brothers and The Dubliners, like "The Wild Rover" or "Whisky in the Jar" are still perhaps the most well known Irish "pub" songs. Edinburgh pub singers (solo performers rather than session singers) still get the loudest cheer from a popular audience for these songs at the end of the evening. Although many people who would style themselves as "real" folkies no longer rate this type of song highly, I have met many singers who admit their first introduction to folk music was through bands like The Dubliners. The more contemporary Irish band The Pogues, who combined Irish folk music with a more raucous, almost punk voice and image (see O'Connor 1991), have supplied the contemporary folk scene with yet more material for the pub-singer's canon; when I have spoken to non-folk fans about folk music, most of them mention either The Dubliners or The Pogues.

In the 1980s, The Pogues (whose name derives from the Irish phrase *póg mó thoin*, which means "kiss my arse") inspired many younger people, in both Britain

and Ireland, who were attracted to traditional music but not to the traditionalist attitudes and images that many of them felt were attached to it. As O'Connor writes:

Off-stage and on, The Pogues disported themselves like archetypal Paddies, with a reputation for hard drinking, bad manners, and disdain for personal appearance. The Pogues' music, attitudes and lifestyles outraged a wide range of people from parents to traditionalists (*ibid.*; 159).

I have encountered many young singers, musicians and listeners in Edinburgh who have been influenced by the image The Pogues popularised. There are a handful of Irish "theme" pubs in Edinburgh which have bands who sing their songs and inspire a kind of drunken ceilidh/slam dancing session. Although these sorts of performances are sometimes frowned upon by people who would deem themselves serious folkies, they have an undeniable "good time" appeal for a relatively large population. Likewise, this "roughing-up" of folk has filtered its way into many more bands, both Scottish and Irish, and has added an image of youthfulness that the folk scene was in many ways deemed to be lacking in earlier days of the revival.

In the 1970's, Irish instrumental music began to rise to the fore of the folk scene as bands like The Chieftains, and later Planxty (made up of the four of the "top" contemporary Irish performers: Andy Irvine, Donal Lunny, Liam O'Flynn and Christy Moore) achieved success amongst both folkie and more generally popular audiences. They were also responsible for introducing a broader range of instruments into Irish music, particularly the bouzouki (*ibid.*), which is currently one of the "trendiest" instruments in the Irish and Scottish scenes. As many people have pointed out to me, this revival was largely aided by the Irish broadcaster RTE's deliberate prioritisation of traditional and contemporary Irish music. Irish instrumental music soon came to dominate the Scottish folk scene as well.

Instrumental pub sessions, in which a majority or even all of the tunes were Irish, began to displace the song-based folk clubs which had spearheaded the revival since the 1950's.

It is not clear why Irish tunes should have become so much more popular in Scotland than Scottish ones, most of which are structurally very similar. However, having asked various musicians' opinion on the matter, a number of people have told me that until recently, Scottish instrumental music was still laden with parochial associations and often felt to be too implicated with the rather staid country-dance and piping circles. There seems to have been a substantial amount of feeling that Irish music was more lively and more amenable to a youthful or popular audience than its Scottish counterpart.

Many Scottish musicians were, and perhaps still are, attracted by the images Irish traditional music evokes. Some people speak of Ireland as something of the centre of the Celtic cultural world. People will often speak of Ireland (meaning, generally, Eire rather than Northern Ireland) as a place where Celtic music is still an active and central part of daily life in a more organic sense than it is here. In some ways, folk music in Ireland is seen to be more contextually authentic than it is here; one gets the sense that some people imagine parts of Ireland (particularly the west) as places where the music is played forever, the stout is poured twenty-four hours a day, and the familiar problems of the late twentieth century are far from everyone's minds.

If pushed, people tend to acknowledge that the music has undergone a revival in Ireland, as it has done here, and that it isn't as "organic" there as they sometimes

portray it to be. In fact, the whole session “culture” in Ireland (and later, Scotland): the more or less informal gathering of musicians in pubs, is largely a product of this revival. Older musicians talk about how, prior to the emergence of bands such as The Dubliners, musicians gathered largely in private houses, but not in pubs. What strikes me, however, is that many Irish-inclined musicians do not actually like to acknowledge Ireland’s revival.

Among some musicians (though certainly not all), record companies (such as the East Lothian-based Greentrax) and many folk audiences, the term “Celtic” music has come to override regional variations and those between Scottish and Irish musical styles.<sup>5</sup> Many professional musicians now capitalise on the global popularity of “Celtic” music without having to worry too much about stylistic differences or overly discerning audiences. There are many musicians at Edinburgh sessions who play both Scottish and Irish tunes in the same Irish style (the melodies tend to be more heavily decorated with grace notes and added triplets and the notes tend to be of even lengths, where as the Scottish style is more syncopated: “The musicians’ idealised ‘Scottish sound was *rhythmically* distinct from an ‘Irish’ sound. ‘Scottish’ music was ‘jaggy’ and ‘spiky’...It was punchy; it had snap and cut. ‘Irish’ music in contrast was ‘rolling’, ‘flowing’, ‘hypnotic’...”(Symon 1997; 209). Of course, this description neglects the fact that in both Scotland and Ireland, there is a tremendous range of regional styles and differences, which makes any objective characterisation

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<sup>5</sup> It may be interesting to note that all of the major record shops in Edinburgh (including Coda, which specialises in folk material) separate stocks into *folk*-- which includes instrumental music and song from throughout Scotland, England, Ireland and North America—and *Scottish*—which is generally comprised of pipe bands and country dance music.

of what actually distinguishes Scottish music from Irish very difficult.<sup>6</sup> Some accomplished musicians (fiddlers and pipers mostly), will become experts in one or more regional styles, but the average session player does not do so.

However, in recent years there has been something of a resurgence of Scottish instrumental tunes. Both “traditional” tunes and new ones written in the traditional style have become increasingly popular, both in sessions and among bands which are either purely instrumental or which combine instrumental music and song. I would argue that part of this renewed interest in Scottish tunes has arisen out of the booming popularity of ceilidh dancing. Many up and coming Scottish musicians have spent time playing in ceilidh bands before moving on to bands which record and perform non-ceilidh concerts. Furthermore, bands like Easy Club, Old Blind Dogs, and later Buràch, Shooglenifty, The Tartan Amoebas, and Martyn Bennett combine traditional Scottish tunes with jazz rhythms, African drums, synthesisers, and electric instruments, thus either overtly or tacitly arguing that Scottish music is just as flexible and can be just as “hip” as Irish music. In 1996, a new collection of recently-written Scottish tunes, entitled *The nineties collection*, was published as both a book of music and as a CD. Many of the tunes have already worked their way into the repertoires of session musicians, and one now gains a sense that there is a growing effort to ensure that the Scottish musical tradition is seen as vibrant as that in Ireland.

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<sup>6</sup> Although most performers tend to identify tunes as either Scottish or Irish, it should be noted that there is not really any clear distinction. The flow of both styles and of individual pieces of music between the two countries has taken place, in both directions, for many centuries. For example, it is likely that reels, the one of the most popular types of tune in both Scottish and Irish music, were a late 17th or early 18th century Scottish export to Ireland (Cullinane 1994; 193).

There is (as Symon, 1997, discusses), a politicised aspect of this process, which in my mind accompanies a wider Scottish cultural nationalism. As I have noted earlier, this turning away from Irish music can be located within a wider process of turning *toward* forms which are felt to be specifically Scottish. The Adult Learning Project's Scots Music Group, for example, consciously prioritises the teaching of Scottish tunes. While nobody objects to the occasional Irish (or other) tune, tutors are under strict instruction to ensure that the bulk of their material is Scottish. Many musicians who play regularly at Edinburgh sessions have come through ALP and have brought these tunes into regular public performance. Many of these musicians have told me that they try to maintain a primarily Scottish repertoire. *"I get really annoyed with people who only play Irish tunes,"* said one friend, *"I mean, what's wrong with ours, for Christ's sake? I don't mind playing the odd Irish reel or jig, but I am a Scottish musician after all."*

Scottish and Irish tunes now get roughly equal playing time in Edinburgh sessions, although I would hazard a guess that Irish tunes might still be more popular at sessions in other parts of the country (I am basing this assumption on the sessions I have encountered at festivals around the country). Some sessions are primarily Scottish and others are Irish; as has been mentioned previously, newcomers can ruffle feathers when they play the "wrong" sort of tune at some sessions. However, I also am starting to feel that the mixing of both Irish and Scottish tunes at most sessions indicates a healthier attitude towards the music and a growing confidence that Irish music does not necessarily pose a threat to the survival or success of Scottish music.



The growing volume and popularity of instrumental music (whether it be Irish or Scottish) has been met with mixed emotion by observers of the folk scene, as it has by people I have had contact with. Some singers, or those more interested in listening to song, often reveal a deep frustration with the instrumental “explosion”.

Munro writes:

The cliché ‘too much of a good thing’ springs to mind--and in more ways than one, for often the same (dance) tune is repeated over and over again, usually *forte*... if you are sitting listening, the repetition can become positively tedious. One sometimes feels the players are enjoying themselves more than the listeners are (*ibid.*; 164).

Singers and fans of folk song also lament the closing of what was an important outlet for political commentary and satire:

All of this [the instrumental revival] is a hugely exciting development, but it is hardly good news for those singers who have something to say, whether in the form of classic narrative Scots ballad or contemporary firecracker. Somebody has to suffer in a time of boom and the folk scene’s unfortunate casualties are the singers (Clark; in *The Scotsman* 6/1/96).

On the other hand, of course, many people see the instrumental boom as both a vibrant and refreshingly youthful expression of Scottish culture and as a way of projecting Scottish music into the future and into a popular, global market. The combining of traditional Scottish or Irish tunes and instrumentation with more contemporary jazz or rock rhythms and instruments has helped to popularise the music and, to an extent, help it transcend the divide between folk and popular genres. While some singers complain about the apparent political ambiguity of instrumental music, I would argue that in many ways the music has occupied, since the 1970’s, a more central symbolic position within an awakening Scottish cultural nationalism than has traditional song. Equally, Gaelic bands like Runrig and Capercaillie, who



combine Gaelic lyrics and melodies with rock and pop styles, gain a large non-Gaelic speaking audience due to the associations their music has to Highland Scottish life and the bands' own pro-Gaelic political rhetoric.

The performers of this music consciously present a version of Scottishness or Celticness which is at once traditional and firmly geographically rooted and at the same time global and undeniably contemporary; within this new scene, most people I know see no paradox when Capercaillie's Karen Matheson walks onto the stage in platform boots and black leather and sings the most haunting of Gaelic laments, nor is there such (in most minds, at least) when The Old Blind Dogs' Fraser Fyfield puts down his small pipes and picks up his saxophone to accompany singer Ian Benzie's versions of traditional north-eastern bothy ballads (though the pipes get the louder cheer). There are now many bands on the folk scene which incorporate both traditional folk and more contemporary genres into their performances. As Greentrax producer Ian Green told Alasdair Clark in *The Scotsman*, the music has now become part of a world industry and must, in some ways, bend with the ebb and flow of the market:

Folk music is a phrase that should be quietly tucked up in bed and put to sleep. It's too closely associated with the old image of the Aran sweaters and the finger in the ear. The word that now sells folk music is now 'Celtic'. You can mention it anywhere in the world and people react instantly (cited in *ibid.*)

Many singers complain that this growth of instrumental music has made the folk scene more exclusionary (by the simple fact that one must learn an instrument but can sing along anytime) and has thus compromised the importance of audience participation and interaction with performers. At the same time, however, the

number of people learning instruments such as the fiddle continues to rise and the growing number of instrumental sessions means that there are more opportunities for instrumentalists to play in public. Ceilidhs at the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh sell out on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

*"Have you heard the new Shooglenifty CD yet?"* my friend Jon asks me in an email from Southern California. Shooglenifty are an Edinburgh band who back powerful fiddling with a sometimes hypnotic rave bass and keyboard accompaniment. *"They're playing here next month,"* he tells me. I reply that I have just seen two members of the band playing in a session at a pub in Leith and he is envious. The players can sit in the pub, bumping elbows with their fans and laughing at the same jokes as folk musicians, according to the canons of the folk scene, *should* do. At the same time, they can tour through Europe and North America and Asia and sell cds there. They can perform in front of a global audience at a concert to celebrate the opening of the World Cup in Paris or play on soundtracks of Hollywood blockbusters, and then they can come home to their favourite pub again.

There is no telling where it will all go from here. I have no doubt that the interests in Scottish traditional music are tied in with a greater cultural nationalism both in Scotland and the world more generally. It is also implicated in the "world music" industry, which both promotes and to a degree exploits local traditions and styles. Whether the music moves more deeply into a popular realm or fades again into relative obscurity with the passing of a fashion is impossible to predict. Thus, I should conclude this history where it began, with the assertion that studies of

Scottish music should be as much about contemporary social trends as they are about “traditional” folklore and folk culture. The music should not be seen as an isolated cultural practice that survives ‘because it has always been done that way’ but as a socially embedded one, which changes both volume and key with a changing society.

Folk and traditional music also occupy a place in a changing Scottish cultural realm more generally. The following chapter will examine some of the themes that can be identified within contemporary Scottish popular culture, media and artistic expression, and will illustrate the ways in which these themes have been influenced by recent political events.

## **V: Casting off the Cringe: cultural themes and changes in devolving Scotland**

Let me tell you that I love you  
And I think about you all the time  
Caledonia you're calling me  
Now I'm going home.  
And if I should become a stranger  
You know that it would make me more than sad.  
Caledonia's been everything I ever had.  
---Dougie Maclean: "Caledonia"

Having traced historical developments in the previous chapter, I will now examine some of the issues and themes that arise out of popular cultural forms in contemporary Scotland. It should be stated again that folk musical performance is only one among many modes of expression engaged in explorations of Scottishness(es). This chapter will touch upon literature and mass media as well as music. As established in the previous chapter, a debate about the role of Scottish literature and language has been central in the calls for political change. I argue that for many people, Scottishness is both expressed and, more importantly, cultivated through involvement in various aspects of popular culture, such as music, favoured literature, the purposeful use of particular linguistic modes of expression, sport, food and so on. Through these sorts of involvements, in other words, people create, consume and embody Scottishness.

An attempt to unearth any core elements of Scottishness would be, of course, a pointless exercise. However, a reading of recent developments in Scottish music, literature and media reveals a broadly coherent theme: that *Scotland* as a national entity (with its component historical, cultural, geographical and political parts) is

increasingly relevant and central in cultural/artistic expression. Expression *of* Scotland rather than simply *from* it is now the aim within many cultural circles. Furthermore, the so-called Scottish Cringe: the label attached to a perceived embarrassment many Scots are meant to have felt at their own provinciality/tartan-clad culture/statelessness/inability to win at football/whatever other failing might conceivably be pinned on Scottishness, is being replaced by self-confidence. This statement itself is not particularly original, nor are the issues that will be touched upon here. This chapter will, however, begin to provide some ethnographic illustration of how particular individuals situate themselves within this process. I use one friend, an aspiring writer named Paul, as a particular example though will also refer to others in less detail.

### **(Popular) culture: toward a working definition**

Before proceeding onto the more ethnographic discussion, however, it is worth briefly outlining the manner in which I employ the word culture. As exemplified by the articles in a recent supplemental issue of *Current Anthropology* (1999), the definition and use of the very concept of *culture* is still a matter of some debate. In agreement with Brumann (*ibid*), I argue that the word has been too central within both academic and popular discourses to reject it entirely on the grounds that it reifies what is really amorphous and transitory. The lesson taken from postmodernism, as he states it, is an understanding that what people see as “their culture” is often a rather “arbitrary selection” surrounded by arbitrary boundaries (*ibid*; S12). However, we must also acknowledge that, despite its

arbitrary nature, “our culture” still carries some emotional and political weight for most individuals.

Discussions of musical and artistic performance, particularly in Western societies, tend to employ the rather less all-encompassing concept of popular culture. Throughout much of this century, until the theoretical turn toward *practice* in the seventies, much popular culture theory was dominated by a conceptual division between “popular” and “mass” culture (Strinati 1995), whereas within anthropology a similar divide has often manifested itself in discussion of indigenous versus imported or globalising culture. Briefly, popular culture was seen to arise authentically from “the people” while mass culture (as embodied, in the minds of the largely European theorists, by the technological and artistic products of American capitalism) was mass produced, anonymous, and homogenising:

Folk art grew from below. It was a spontaneous, autochthonous expression of the people, shaped by themselves, pretty much without the benefit of High Culture, to suit their own needs. Mass Culture is imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying...(MacDonald 1957; quoted by Strinati 1995; 10).

In industrialised societies, then, “popular culture” was increasingly located in the past, among the authentic rural folk (those very same folk whose music men like Sharp and Child sought to salvage) who were thought to have been transformed into the fragmented and unthinking masses during and after the industrial revolution.

Mid-century cultural theorists, such as members of the Frankfurt School like Adorno and Horkheimer, saw mass culture to be the means whereby society was debased and oppressed by capitalist productive forces (Cohen 1991, Martin 1995, Strinati 1995). Adorno, for example, believed that popular music was becoming

increasingly standardised and served to further reconcile people to the repetitive and homogeneous existence they occupied as part of the industrial masses:

They want standardised goods and pseudo-individualisation, because their leisure is an escape from work and at the same time is moulded after those psychological attitudes to which their workaday world exclusively habituates them. Popular music is for the masses a perpetual businessman's holiday (Adorno 1991, quoted by Strinati 1995; 68).

The influences of Marxism can, of course, be seen here but unlike twentieth century Marxists such as Gramsci, Adorno saw little hope for the potential of popular culture to be used as resistance to political or economic domination. For Adorno, it was only in aspects of "high" culture, such as avant-garde music that there was still space for individual thought, innovation or creativity.

Rather than differentiating "mass" from "popular" culture, Gramsci drew the line between "high" or bourgeois culture, which was associated with capitalist modes of production and oppression, and popular culture. For Gramsci, popular culture consisted of not only art and musical forms but also of local or folk "philosophies"; rather than being suppressed or made irrelevant by capitalist society, these held the potential to form an alternative hegemony (Henderson 1988, Strinati 1995). Thus, popular culture was seen as a means of resistance to élite political and cultural hegemony

Contemporary sociology and cultural studies have found Gramsci's notion of hegemony, and his belief in the power of popular culture to resist it, to be seductive. The power, and indeed the very existence, of an all-encompassing class-based hegemony is of course questionable. However, I would argue that it is still a useful concept when applied, in a more limited sense, "in the analysis of a wide range of social struggles" (Strinati 1995; 174). Furthermore, people use localised popular

culture, or that associated with local or even national identity, in order to resist the dominance of what they perceive to be an external or globalising culture. They may also appropriate and re-interpret that external culture and thus use it in a way which defies existing power hierarchies (deCerteau 1984; 18).

I argue, then, that the division between popular and mass culture is not a useful one. Following Miller and his contributors (1995a, 1995b), I suggest that we are not blind consumers and that market forces do not entirely determine either which products we buy or how we interpret those products. Miller writes that “The varied ‘local’ cultures of consumption and business are not remnants to be eliminated by a new global hegemony, but the motor behind abstracted, aggregate and finally global changes”(1995a; 50). Likewise the varied local modes of cultural *production*, musical performance, for example, are equally important in global processes and that these too must not be seen as remnants of an older socio-economic order.

Very roughly, I would follow deCerteau’s (1984) notion that popular culture is not a bounded body of performative or material culture but rather a loosely formulated and highly permeable mode (or modes) of being in the world, of acting, of thinking and of speaking. Seen in this light, popular culture can be seen as an arena in which individual and social identities are formulated through practice. Similarly, from Hall’s discussion of the formation of identity, we can treat popular cultural performances as episodes in an ongoing narrative through which the individual becomes situated within the social. He writes: “[Identities] arise from the narrativisation of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity...”(1996; 4).



The rest of this chapter will engage with some of the changes that have been occurring within Scottish popular cultural expression in relation to the changing political situation.

### **The Scottish Cringe and the New Dawn**

#### *Paul's story*

A young Edinburgh-based writer named Paul, who I have known since shortly after my arrival in Edinburgh in October, 1994, exemplifies these changes both in his art and in his political sentiments. Although one cannot generalise about the experiences or sentiments of every writer or musician from those of one man, we can regard him as useful case study because he fits a broad pattern identified in mass and academic media alike.

Not long after I arrived in Edinburgh, a mutual friend took me to a pub called Robbie's on Leith Walk, where she introduced me to Paul. He is a small, wiry young man a year or so older than myself, with a distinct West Coast accent, a sharp wit and an easy laugh. That night he wore his standard type of garb: jeans, frayed at the knee, a tee-shirt, and a heavy grey wool coat. Over what he swore were the best pints of McEwan's 80 Shilling in the city, I learned that he was an aspiring writer. At the time, he was working on a play. His father, a joiner to trade, is involved in an amateur drama group and sometimes helped Paul cast and produce his plays.

Paul is not involved with folk music, but he likes it and occasionally attends ceilidhs or pub sessions. One of his locally based cousins plays in a folk group, and Paul, whose family has strong Irish connections, is an appreciative, if not regular

listener. He invited me to my first Burns Supper, hosted by his father's drama company, and also took me to my first football match: Hibernian versus Rangers at Easter Road. On top of his talent for writing, Paul is a skilled footballer and had as an under-18, been targeted by recruiters from Celtic. A number of us started playing football together, informally, in The Meadows. Paul always ran circles round the rest of us, and then we'd all go to the pub and talk about literature and history and Scotland. Although Paul left school at sixteen, he is highly and enthusiastically self-educated.

I told him of my interests in Scottish politics and identity, and he began to list novels he thought I should read. I was in the middle of *The Crow Road*, by Iain Banks at the time, and Paul seemed surprised to learn that I had read Jeff Torrington's *Swing hammer swing*, set in the Gorbals in Glasgow in the mid-sixties, before even coming to Scotland. One day he arrived at my door, carrying a copy of William MacIlvanney's novel *Docherty* (the story of a family in a fictional Ayrshire mining town in the early part of the century), and said "*You've gotta read this if you want to understand Scotland.*" Paul had grown up largely in the west of Scotland and told me he could hear his family speak in MacIlvanney's prose.

As we became friends, he barraged me with similar novels or made me listen to cassettes of Billy Connolly's comic performances, always portraying these male, somewhat nostalgically working class, and very West Coast images as essentially Scottish. He often told me stories of his favourite places in Scotland or about his family in rural Ireland. Walking from Forrest Road to George IV Bridge one day, he nudged me and pointed out two American tourists, tartan caps on their heads, taking

photographs of the statue of Greyfriars' Bobby<sup>1</sup>. He enjoyed watching me squirm at the rather embarrassing antics of American tourists, and then started in on a long critique of the tartan-clad images of Scotland marketed by the tourist industry.

Likewise, in his own writing, Paul continually explores aspects of Scottishness and of his own upbringing, such as his Irish roots and experiences at a Catholic school near Glasgow. He uses Scots rather than standard English in his dialogue (and is obviously proud of his own West Coast patter), and thus infuses his characters with a powerful sense of place, and identity.

When I first met him, he told me that he would never vote Nationalist and equated nationalism with dangerous anti-Englishness. One day after football he embarked on a lengthy rant about how the film *Braveheart* dangerously perpetuated the stereotype that Scots were "*ginger-heided, sword-waving barbarians.*" He was disgusted with the SNP for sending canvassers to distribute leaflets to cinema-goers as they left the film, to catch them while their patriotic passions were stirred. In so doing, too, he started a lengthy argument with another friend who took part in our weekly football match: a ginger-headed and vocal SNP supporter.

Over the years I have known Paul, I've watched his own political views changing. The night before the general election, I was with Paul and a few other friends in the pub, watching a Scotland versus Sweden football match, when he announced to us that he'd decided to vote SNP. He then embarked in a boisterous conversation with another man in the pub, about the possible relationship between the outcome of the match and that of the election the next day. "*See if we win this,*

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<sup>1</sup> The statue commemorates the well known Edinburgh tale of Bobby, a Cairn Terrier who belonged to a friar at Greyfriars Kirk. When the friar died, the little dog lay faithfully on his grave for years, until he too finally died. He was commemorated in a Disney film, and by a statue which stands in front of

*we'll probably vote for independence the morn,"* the other man laughed. *"If we lose, we'll probably let they Tory bastards back in."* This conversation, though joking, has obvious resonance with nationalist politician Jim Sillars' well known remark about Scots being 90 minute patriots (see Cohen 1997).

When I asked Paul what had changed his mind, he said *"When I think about my life--you know, where I come from and who I think I am, I think of myself as Scottish, not British. Britain just doesnae seem relevant tae me. It doesnae represent who I am. I cannae think of myself as a subject of the Queen and that's what it comes down to. I dinnae ken if Scotland will be economically better off independent or not but it goes against my conscience to vote any other way."*

Paul told me later that it was largely through his own writing and reading of Scottish literature that he had felt his identity as Scottish, and not British, had become solidified. Through this reading and writing, he had in many ways formulated his own use of Scots language, his own interpretation of history, and his own sense of belonging to the places in which he had lived. In this sense, he agreed with me that his own identity was inseparable from his relationship with these Scottish cultural forms.

#### **8 May, 1999: Welcome to the New Dawn**

Two nights ago, just as the polls were closing, a number of us were gathering in a favourite session pub, squeezing around the table, tuning our instruments and getting the round of pints in. It turned into an energetic session, driven on by a number of particularly talented fiddlers, and onlookers cheered and stamped their

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a studenty pub also called Greyfriars' Bobby. The statue and the kirkyard have, as a result, become popular tourist attractions.

feet as the sets of reels, jigs and hornpipes got longer and sweatier. There were Scottish tunes and Irish tunes and American Old Time tunes, all swirling together, united by the ringing guitar chords and rhythmic thump of the bodhran. Players met each others' eyes across the table, challenging, urging each other on.

The session is never exactly the same every week, and from my perspective, this one was particularly enjoyable. But nothing out of the ordinary happened. It was much like the session the week before, and perhaps much like the one next week will be. Little occurred in that pub, from which the music could be heard on the other side of the street, to remind us that Scotland had just taken part in its first Parliamentary election for almost 300 years. There were no political songs and there was little discussion of the election, beyond one person occasionally asking another "*So, did you vote, then?*"

A newcomer might not be blamed for mistaking this lively performance to be in honour of the election. They would be, however, wrong. They might also conceivably detect the musicians' lack of comment upon unfolding democratic process and mistake this for apathy. This too would be wrong. The reality of the situation is somewhere in between. The music happened last week and it will happen next; the shape of the parliament to come will not (likely) alter that. However, the youthful energy these players put into the music, and with which it is received by the onlookers in the pub, is connected to a confidence that has both driven the political changes on and has been fuelled by them. Writing in *The Scotsman*, Joyce Macmillan comments:

Now, journalists from outside Scotland often ask what will be the impact of the new parliament on Scottish culture, and, sometimes, why more artists have not been involved in the election campaign. But Creative Scotland—rock, pop, films, books, theatre—did its bit for Scottish self-

government ten and 20 years ago, by demonstrating far beyond a doubt that Scottish culture had a present and a future as well as a past; in matters of identity, it seems, it's often culture that shapes politics, and not vice-versa (7/5/99).

The press tells us this is a turning point, a momentous time: a New Dawn. As they did after the referendum in September, 1997, my friends are responding in a rather less triumphant fashion than is the press. They are sceptical of the power of this parliament and they are asking questions. Will it have teeth sharp enough to really cut itself away from Westminster? Will it be yet another layer of bureaucracy? Will Tony Blair simply rule by proxy through his minion Donald Dewar? Will it just be politics as usual? *How is this going to change my life?* There seems to be little consensus where these questions are concerned; as ever, the Scots are an argumentative bunch. Nairn writes:

"How the Scots love a good argument!" a French friend once observed. He was right, but failed to notice how what they love most is a fiery debate edging on violence and leading safely nowhere. "Nowhere" in this sense is a distinctive Scottish place. What it means is the reassuring void we ken, rather than the unfamiliar gestures of political agreement and compromise: the limbo in which our nation happens to have settled down, as distinct from the common ground of modernity (1997; 184).

Perhaps the argument is leading somewhere now, although not everybody agrees upon whether it is leading in the proper direction. Among the people I know, the most frequent view seems to be that this version of devolution is not powerful enough, although support for the idea of outright independence is not universal, by any means. None of them have vocally argued for the pre-devolution status quo, but outwith the left-wing artistic circles, the voice of conservatism and/or unionism<sup>2</sup> is

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<sup>2</sup> Following the disastrous result for the Conservatives in Scotland in the 1997 general election, the Conservative and Unionist party in Scotland re-launched itself as The Scottish Conservatives. Although they campaigned against devolution prior to the general election and the referendum, they now find themselves reliant upon the proportional vote in the devolved parliament for any political power in Scotland.

still alive, albeit faint: the Scottish Conservatives *did* win roughly 17 percent of the Scottish parliamentary vote. Before the general election two years ago, my friends' questions could only be hypothetical. They could only be uttered with the added qualification "...*if we ever get it.*" As with Paul's political views, there has been a sea change in Scottish expressive culture generally, marking the slow merging of a sense of historical and cultural distinctiveness on the one hand with the recognition of such within the official political system on the other.

### *Casting off the Cringe*

Trying to follow the endless debates about Scottish culture and politics among musicians, in recent literature, in academia, and in the media since 1994, I have been able to watch this change. Gradually, the Scottish Cringe is starting to be shed. Of course the Cringe should not be treated as some sort of Durkheimian social fact which can be identified among every member of the population. It has been, however, a dominant trope within artistic and academic representations of Scotland.

Beveridge and Turnbull's (1989) book, *The eclipse of Scottish culture*, explores the depths to which the Cringe has penetrated Scottish intellectual thought. The authors argue that since the Treaty of Union, Scottish intellectual thought has been plagued by a general "inferiorism", or sense that Scottish popular culture is essentially backward and parochial. They draw upon Fanon's (1967) argument that colonised peoples are deliberately subjected to a process through which they are made to feel that their cultures are impoverished, primitive and inferior to that of the colonising power; thus the colonised become passive and submissive. They also argue that this inferiorism has manifested itself in a widespread intellectual notion



that the Scottish population is inarticulate, passive and unable to think for itself. Here they make explicit the connection between the perception of cultural backwardness and Scotland's hitherto stateless status.

Beveridge and Turnbull critique a number of well-known Scottish intellectual figures for their submission to the idea of the Cringe. For example, they focus one discussion upon Tom Nairn's attack on what he calls the Tartan Monster:

...that prodigious array of *Kitsch* symbols, slogans, ornaments, banners, war-cries, knick-knacks, music hall heroes, icons, conventional sayings and sentiments (not a few of them 'pithy') which have for so long resolutely defended the name of 'Scotland' to the world (Nairn 1977; 162).

Nairn saw tartanry to represent a kind of popular sub-culture rather than anything that might be a thriving or legitimate national culture. It is, in other words, a false-consciousness that fools the population into thinking it has a distinct culture but does not allow it to mobilise itself toward political change. As Beveridge and Turnbull point out, however, this highly critical view overlooks the ideal that tartanry and other popular markers of "Scottishness" might be interpreted and used by the population in a wide variety of ways.

More recent works, however, such as those by Craig (1996), McCrone (1998), and even Nairn himself (1997) have begun to re-examine the diversity of ways in which Scottish popular culture *has* helped lead to political change. As McCrone writes "In recent years, the discourse which sees Scotland locked into a choice between reason and emotion, being British or Scottish, between political and cultural nationalism, has been fast eroding" (1998; 136-7).

A full page article by Angus Calder in *The Scotsman* (5/5/99) details this combination of cultural pride and profound political frustration, largely borne out of two decades of Thatcherism. If there is any such thing as a nation's attitude toward



itself, this is largely perpetuated and inspired by media representations such as this one. Far more audible to the general public than the academic debates, the media has also engaged in discourses about the cringe and involved itself in identity politics and the continual probing for answers to the question “Who are we?”

In August, 1996, I heard a morning chat show on BBC Radio Scotland discussing, in a humorous and self-parodying manner, the “essence of Scottishness”. Each contributor came up with a different list of attributes, revealing that this essence is indeed hard to come by. However, there were two things that most of them seemed to agree on: that Scottishness is in some sense oppositional to Englishness, and a desperate love, in politics and football, of lost causes.

I thought back to an afternoon spent in an Edinburgh pub watching the England-Scotland match in the European Cup earlier that summer. The pub was full of men and women, some of whom had flags tied to their backs, blue and white paint on their faces, or “See ya Jimmy”<sup>3</sup> hats on their heads. My friends, none of whom could be described as regular football fans, were among them. Desperation seemed to hang as thickly in the air as the cigarette smoke and from various corners of the pub, little choruses of “Flower of Scotland” would spontaneously arise and then die out again. “*Please God,*” prayed my friend Ward, a philosophy student and staunch atheist, “*please let us win! If we never win another game, just let us win this one!*” For Ward, as, I suspect, for most of the others in the pub, the desire to win the Cup was entirely overshadowed by the need to beat England.

Ward is not a man who could be accused of or bigotry anti-Englishness on any other occasion. That day, however, he embodied something another one of my

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<sup>3</sup> A tartan bonnet with fake red hair stitched in and hanging out the bottom: popular uniform of Scottish football and rugby supporters.

friends later said to me: *"I don't think there are many Scots who can legitimately say they don't have some amount of anti-English sentiment, however deeply it may be buried. There is always that wee grudge, that wee chip on the shoulder that makes you cringe when you hear a posh English accent. It's not aimed at individuals, necessarily, but at a power relationship. I can only hope that if we get more political power of our own, this might start to go away and we'll be able to see each other as equals."* This position is a contentious one, and one I only have heard spoken by two or three of the left-wing and tolerant people mentioned in this work. At the same time, it is thoughtful and honest (at least from that individual's perspective). It reveals, also, the extent to which the relationships between Scotland and England are intricately linked into a class hierarchy and the common perception north of the border that a southern English accent symbolises wealth and power.

As Paul Gascoigne celebrated after firing a second goal into the Scottish net, the choruses of "Flower of Scotland" grew quieter and died out. The desperation in the air turned to resignation. *"Why do we do this to ourselves?"* Ward queried as we walked home. Princes Street had lost the hum of excitement and the painted faces were down-turned. *"We always seem to get our hopes up and then we shoot ourselves in the foot. Typical bloody Scotland."* The die-hard commitment to a mediocre football team *anywhere* will lead to this same disappointment, but here Scotland's loss to England becomes symbolic of the history between the two countries and Scotland's own inability to break free from this history.

In November of 1995, George Rosie wrote in *The Scotsman*:

How long can we go on deferring hope before a lethal kind of despair sets in? How many more million words and thousands of hours can we spend arguing for a Scottish parliament before we turn away from the British version of democracy, disgusted at the injustice? What happens if hope dies?

...Among the young there is political apathy verging on disgust; among the intelligentsia weariness and something akin to battle fatigue; among the elderly a feeling that, somehow, they have been betrayed.

And then there is the Scottish cringe. For the past 20 years (at least) we have been arguing over the root causes. No-one seems too sure who first cooked up the phrase, but if there was ever a symptom of heartsickness, it is that. It is that deeply rooted feeling that, somehow, other people will always do it better (29/11/95).

Rosie goes on to argue that a parliament would not cure all of Scotland's ills but would certainly start the country down a road that would lead away, finally, from this state of heartsickness. Whether the Scottish population *was* heartsick, weary, and apathetic has not really been established, of course, but certainly the idea of the Cringe held weight in the minds of many people I know.

The at times overwhelming amount of public discourse surrounding Scotland's drive for self-determination would have quite easily fooled one into thinking that political power, or rather the seemingly fruitless quest for it, occupied an almost obsessive place in the collective mind of the population. Scottishness, if a national identity could be said to exist (*before* the referendum, at any rate), seemed to be intricately tied up with a lament for the symbolic headlessness of the nation: an identity founded precariously on an absence.

Novelists and songwriters have also engaged with this position. In *Looking for the possible dance*, Kennedy illustrates and satirises this perceived condition by describing the education of her protagonist, Margaret:

Margaret's education was in no way remarkable, it merely took the Scottish Method to its logical conclusions, secure in the knowledge that no one would ever complain because, after all, it only affected children.

Margaret, like many others, will take the rest of her life to recover from a process we may summarise thus:

The Scottish Method (For the Perfection of Children)

1. Guilt is good.

2. The history, language and culture of Scotland do not exist. If they did, they would be of no importance and might as well not.
3. Masturbation is an abuse of one's self: sexual intercourse, the abuse of one's self by others.
4. The chosen and male shall go forth unto professions while the chosen and female shall be homely, fecund, docile, and slightly artistic.
5. Those not chosen shall be cast out into utter darkness, even unto the ranks of Her Majesty's Armed Forces and Industry.
6. Pain and fear will teach us to hurt and petrify ourselves, thus circumventing further public expense.
7. Joy is fleeting, sinful, and the forerunner of despair.
8. Life is a series of interwoven ceremonies, etiquettes and forms which we will never understand. We may never trust ourselves to others.
9. God hates us. In word, in thought, in deed we are hateful before God and we may do no greater good than to hate ourselves.
10. Nothing in a country which is nothing, we are only defined by what we are not. Our elders and betters are also nothing; we must remember this makes them bitter and dangerous (1993; 15-16).

In a similar vein is Brian McNeill's song entitled "No gods and precious few heroes." It calls for Scots to trade in a sentimental and passive nationalism, perhaps for the sort of socialist-based nationalism envisioned by many members of the folk scene, including Hamish Henderson and Dick Gaughan. It has become a popular song in the Scottish folk scene:

I was listenin' tae the news the other day  
And heard a fat politician who had the cheek to say  
He was proud tae be Scottish, by the way  
For the glories o' the past tae remember.

Here's tae us, wha's<sup>4</sup> like us, listen tae the cry  
There's no surrender tae the truth and here's the reason why  
The pride and the glory's just another bloody lie  
They use tae keep us all in line

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<sup>4</sup> Wha's like us: who's like us: referring to the stereotypical Scottish saying, "Wha's like us? Damn few and they're a' deid!"

**chorus:** For there's no gods and there's precious few heroes  
But there's plenty on the dole in the land o' the leal<sup>5</sup>  
And its time now tae sweep the future clear  
O' the lies of a past that we know was never real

So farewell tae the heather and the glen  
They cleared us all off once and they'll do it all again  
For they still prefer sheep tae thinkin men  
But men who think like sheep are even better

There's nothin' much tae choose between the auld laird and the new  
They still don't give a damn for the likes o' me and you  
So mind you pay your rent tae the factor when its due  
And mind your bloody manners when you pay.

**chorus**

And tell me will we never hear the end  
O' pair bloody Charlie at Culloden yet again  
Though he ran like a rabbit doon the glen  
Leavin better folk than him tae be butchered.

Are you sittin in your council hoose dreamin o' yer clan  
And waitin for the Jacobites tae come and free the land?  
Try goin doon the broo<sup>6</sup> wi' your claymore in your hand  
And count all the princes in the queue.

**chorus**

So don't talk tae me of Scotland the Brave  
For if we don't fight soon there'll be nothin left tae save  
Or would you rather stand and watch them dig your grave  
While you wait for the tartan messiah.

He'll lead us tae the promised land wi' laughter in his eye  
And we'll all live on the oil and the whisky by and by  
Free heavy beer, pie suppers in the sky  
Will we never hae the sense tae learn

That there's no gods and there's precious few heroes  
But there's plenty on the dole in the land o' the leal  
But I'm damn sure there's plenty live in fear  
O' the day we stand together with our shoulders tae the wheel.

Aye there's no gods.

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<sup>5</sup> land o' the leal: land of the true/brave

<sup>6</sup> broo: from bureau: benefits office

The papers started proclaiming the arrival of the new dawn as a Labour victory in the 1997 general election came to look more and more assured. With a Labour government would come a referendum on devolution, and the media worked alongside the politicians to convince the Scottish population that devolution would indeed bring this hopeful metaphor to fruition. The Scottish papers were filled with discussions of Scotland's new-found self-confidence, the casting off of the Cringe, the new age that would come with the millennium and the parliament. A full page article on *Scotland on Sunday* (11/5/1997) argued that Scotland was living through a new age of enlightenment and proceeded to outline a full host of recent achievements in Scottish arts and sciences. With the growing self confidence in these areas, the article states, so will come a growing confidence in a political drive toward self-determination. The new dawn, so we are led to believe, is the rejection of an old colonial order, in which Scotland will finally emerge from its long-occupied status as one of the fringes (or "appendages" as *The Sunday Times* put it on 5/2/1995) hanging from the edge of Britain and stubbornly refusing to integrate itself.

Again, it is difficult to tell how accurately or how far this media coverage reflects popular sentiment. Statistical evidence confirms that close to three times as many Scots identify themselves as Scottish *over* being British than would identify themselves as being equally Scottish and British or more British; in England, nearly fifty percent of the population say they are equally English and British (McCrone *et al.* 1998; 630-31). These statements of identity have now translated themselves into political change. What they cannot do is reveal the complexity of understandings with which the population is meeting these changes. On the day of the parliamentary

election, I asked friends who'd been to vote how they felt. They were all non-committal in their answers: shrugs and statements of "*Let's see what happens...*" were the order of the day. And yet, these are all people who, prior to the general election and referendum, expressed (with the media and the popular cultural forms) an almost entirely one-sided argument in support of some kind of self-determination. In many ways, I would argue, the symbolic importance of the parliament ranks alongside the belief in its ability to provide a more economically prosperous future (although this statement may conflict with what many of my friends actually *say* when they say their nationalism is not emotional but based around an economic position).

### **Performing Scotlands: the politicisation of culture**

In 1955, Scottish novelist Robin Jenkins argued that it was "...the duty of the Scottish novelist to portray [Scottish peculiarities] in his writing" (cited by Zenzinger 1989; 217). The belief that the artistic communities have a responsibility to promote Scotland as a nation and that self-determination is fundamentally *a good thing* is more or less taken for granted by most of the artists I know, as it is by much of the Scottish media. As such, Scotland as both a physical entity and a political process, resides at the core of most forms of artistic expression. Cultural expression, in the current climate, is always implicitly political even when it is not explicitly so.

Within the musical community, there is a general feeling that the music and traditional culture will flourish with devolution. For example, the Adult Learning Project issued its programme for the academic year 1997-98 to coincide with the referendum. The programme, which listed classes on offer, was entitled *Rights and*



*responsibilities: building the new Scotland.* The pamphlet was actually printed and released several days before the referendum, on the assumption that devolution would be approved, and made apparent the fact that the organisation sees itself as having a responsibility to promote the cultural side of the new, improved nation.

Similarly, the previous spring, ALP's Scots Music Group circulated a pamphlet listing its aims, among which were:

*--To create a positive and critical relationship of respect and status to Scots music, song and dance that it may live in the hearts of the local community and beyond.*

*--To build a repertoire in the Scots idiom, with reference to the past, present and into the future.*

Encouraging the performance of Scottish music, both traditional and contemporary, is seen by most of ALP's members and organisers (as well as most musicians not connected with ALP) as an active and necessary aspect of the construction of the "new" Scotland. Musicians also see the revival as something that has helped bring about the political changes. People in the music scene frequently talk about a growing awareness and appreciation of Scotland's music, particularly as manifested by the shift of emphasis from American and Irish material to Scottish. They discuss this awareness of music, along with Scottish languages, literature and other cultural forms as prerequisites for the governmental changes that have now begun to occur.

Members and administrators of ALP took an active role in Scotland Forward, an umbrella group which campaigned heavily in favour of devolution prior to the referendum. Nobody I know within the organisation publicly questioned whether a culturally-oriented community education scheme *should* involve itself in such political campaigning, nor was there apparent concern that some members or students with conflicting sentiments might be placed in an awkward position. There

is a large handful of English people involved in ALP classes, and although I never heard any of them register complaint or disagreement with the organisation's position, political discussion in the music classes themselves (or at least the ones in which I have been involved) has been kept to a minimum. More politically charged conversation is normally reserved for the pub sessions following the classes, and here a range of opinions were expressed to me.

One English woman, who had lived in Scotland for a number of years, told me privately that she voted SNP but didn't like to advertise the fact in case anyone questioned her *right* to do so. On the other hand, at a singing session shortly after the general election, a young man who had only come along once or twice previously, said, very quietly, that he followed the Conservative party. Conversation, which had been particularly anti-Tory that night and interspersed with boisterous renditions of socialist anthems, stopped momentarily and everyone looked at him and then each other. Nobody commented, and the man said nothing further and left soon thereafter. When he was gone, everyone speculated aloud as to whether he'd been joking or not. People were so genuinely concerned that a young Scottish man, and a folk singer at that, could support the Tories that they were not certain whether nor not to take it seriously. Removed from the company of other musicians, people have expressed their questions and fears to me, but these do not generally seem to be aired in a larger company, where the name *Thatcher* is uttered like a particularly vehement curse. Within musical and other artistic circles, an anti-devolution stance came to be politically incorrect and any expression of personal fear indicated a loss of nerve and was simply not publicly acceptable.

The musicians I know, like Paul the writer, illustrate the extent to which an emergent cultural identity has now influenced the direct political identity of Scotland. Furthermore, people use their own involvement within the cultural arena in order to create a sense of national identity that is rooted in actual lived lives and not some more or less arbitrary collection of icons and symbols. I argue that the core of the experience of the nation resides in the concrete factors of daily life, and that popular culture occupies a large chunk of this life. Billig's (1995) examination of the ways in which the nation is perpetually "flagged" at an everyday level and thus becomes banal, even hegemonic, is only a partial account of this situation. By identifying the flags, the speeches, the sporting events and the Pledges of Allegiance, as specific sites through which the nation is *reinforced* in the minds of the population, Billig cannot account for individual interpretations and variations. Cohen reminds us that the nation cannot have meaning unless the individual is allowed some interpretive leeway within a common cultural frame:

This is not to suggest that Scotland is mere figment of the nationalist imagination. The histories, literatures, folklores, traditions, languages, musics, landscapes and foods of Scotland are social facts on which individuals draw in providing themselves with a shared vocabulary. That is how culture works. Even though they may be interpreted differently, it is on the sharing of these items that the compelling sentiment of and attachment to the nation is predicated (1996; 805).

One of the marked aspects of Scottish cultural nationalism, however, is the extent to which it tolerates, and even cultivates, internal *differences*. "In principle," writes Handler, "national being is defined by a homogeneity which encompasses diversity: however individual members of the nation may differ, they share essential attributes that constitute their national identity; sameness overrides difference"(1988; 6). In the case to which Handler specifically refers, Quebec, the essential attribute is

the French language. Unlike Quebec, or Wales for that matter, Scotland cannot use a common language to focus its construction of a homogeneous national identity.

Within some nationalist discourses, Scotland's internal diversities (not just the Highland/Lowland divide but also class, linguistic and religious differences) have been portrayed as weaknesses in the fabric of the national community. For example, Bruce writes:

Though the community that is the nation is "imagined", the absence of a pre-existing community [in Scotland], imagined in ethnic, religious or linguistic terms, or the absence of external economic, political, or martial pressure sufficient to overcome internal divisions will prevent the creation of a nation (1993; 15).

This is not, however, a common view. We must question whether this overriding homogeneity, imagined or otherwise, is necessary for the creation (or maintenance) of a nation. If we follow contemporary theories of ethnicity (i.e. Barth 1969, 1994; Vermulen & Govers 1994), we need not look for objective racial, linguistic or religious homogeneity within a group but rather at the ways in which that group comes to formulate itself and thus differentiates itself from other groups. Scottishness should not be regarded itself as an ethnicity (and most of the people I know would not describe it as such, although as I will discuss later, Gaeldom may be an exception), but the relevant point made by this theory is that internal difference need not indicate that Scottishness is a meaningless title. As McCrone (1992, 1998) points out, Scottish nationalism tends to prioritise geographical connections rather than specifically ethnic ones.

Within the musical circles, as in other cultural arenas such as literature, Scotland's diversity is often used as a source of education and inspiration. Paul's sense of himself as a Scot (and a Scottish writer) is powerfully connected to his

experiences of growing up in a working class, West Coast Catholic family. Folk and traditional music is used extensively as a realm in which to explore the regional variations in Scotland and thus to create a portrait of a nation arising out of a diversity of situations.

People also use music in order to claim affiliations with these various situations (and chapters seven and eight will discuss this process in more detail). “Peripheral” parts of Scotland, like Shetland or the West Highlands or the rural Northeast, are made central in much discourse and are seen as places that are both historically and currently important in a Scottish cultural/political project. So too, however, are those places that have carried the weight of an industrial history: the Clydeside shipyards, the Dundee jute mills, the Midlothian mining communities. Musicians and singers very often prioritise the music connected with such places. Their discourse speaks often of possession: this is “our” music, this is “our” language, this is “our” culture.

Likewise, when people sing about history, the history they sing about is in many ways highly localised in that it arises out of local traditions, events and experiences. However, through the medium of song, they can transform specific references into general ones and local histories into national ones. Furthermore, through music, they can marry “local” or “national” traditions with contemporary cultural forms in order to emphasise that their performances are at once relevant to contemporary life and at the same time rooted to place and a sense of continuity.

As stated previously, the folk musical community is not a singular entity but related in many ways to Scottish literary, artistic, dramatic and linguistic circles. Many people move between these circles, carrying their interests in various aspects

of Scottish cultural experience with them and ensuring that these arts draw not only upon their own traditions but from each other. As has been mentioned, there has never been a strict division between the song and oral traditions and literary ones here. Burns, for example, is an icon for both poets and singers. In the twentieth century, folk singers and novelists alike have been inspired by the attention focused upon Scots language by MacDiarmid and his contemporaries. Contemporary artists draw upon common historical and political references and thus can be seen to be actively promoting Scotland as a centre of cultural and artistic achievement, rather than as a peripheral branch of a London-focused British culture.

At the same time, however, the folk scene occupies a difficult position within Scottish popular culture more generally. First, although people within the musical community itself like to portray the music as absolutely central to life in Scotland, outside of that community it is not central at all. This may be because it receives little air time on stations to which young people listen (Only BBC Radio Scotland devotes a significant amount of time to traditional music), and because it is not taught with consistency in most schools (Miller, in *The Scotsman*; 12/5/99). Often traditional music is associated with a kind of parochial, tartan clad culture from which many young and forward-thinking Scots would seek to distance themselves. Scottish musicians have yet to achieve the sort of international popularity won by Irish bands like The Corrs, who combine traditional elements with an essentially pop image.

Many contemporary Scottish folk musicians try as hard as they can to dissociate themselves from tartanry or dance-hall music. But sometimes in the face of grumbling condemnation they actually adopt these images, in a deliberately

parodying manner. As Hertzfeld remarks, national stereotypes "...offer citizens a sense of defiant pride in the face of a more formal or official morality and, sometimes of official disapproval too. These are the self-stereotypes that insiders express ostensibly at their own collective expense" (1997; 3).

For example, prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit which occurred in Edinburgh in November, 1997, Tony Blair announced that bagpipes would not be used as part of the official celebrations. The reason for this ban was that the pipes projected an air of old-fashioned ceremony which Blair was trying to remove from his new "Cool Britannia." Although most of the people I know in the music scene are not themselves fond of the militaristic piping traditions, Blair's comments riled many of them. One woman said, *"He's got nae right tellin us oor pipes have nae place. We voted for him, for Christ's sake, but maybe no the next time! It's just this kind of thing Westminster does that pisses me off."* The group of women singers I perform with was doing a short spot at a multi-cultural arts event as part of the CHOGM celebrations. Performing after us was a group of young highland dancers in their bright tartan skirts, and as we left the stage, they came prancing in accompanied by a piper in full regalia. Fellow singer Mary, a quiet woman who normally dismisses piping as part of the male dominated military tradition, raised her fist in the air and yelled *"Ha! Sorry Tony!"*

Similarly, the Edinburgh-based accordion player Sandy Brechin, who performs solo and as a member of the band Buràch, often appears on stage in denim shorts and boots, long hair wild as he plays. One of his sets of tunes is called "It's accordion music, Jim, but not as we know it!" His band features the accordion, backed by electric bass and rock-style drum beats, and the tunes are played in a fast,



almost frenetic fashion which is perfect for disco-type dancing but entirely unsuitable for country dancing.

These uses of the pipes or the piano accordion, which are powerfully associated with the type of sub-culture people like Nairn have so vigorously attacked, is a more effective cure for parochiality than an argumentative verbal or written debate about legitimacy or authenticity. Likewise, speaking of Yorùbá *fùjì* music in West Africa, Barber and Waterman see the combination of indigenous styles with an eclectic combination of outside influences not as the watering down of local authenticity but as a way in which musicians “domesticate” musical elements from many sources into a local mode of expression (1995; 243). A similar process happens here. I argue that by promoting themselves as modern, worldly and firmly Scottish at the same time, musicians here are making a powerful statement that the history, language, and culture of Scotland *do* indeed exist and are highly relevant to contemporary life and politics.

### *Language*

A discussion of the varying use of cultural forms and markers would be incomplete without a brief discussion of language. Within the twentieth century Scottish cultural expression generally, language is perhaps the most easily recognised and readily used marker of Scottishness, and of regional variation within Scotland (see R. Watson 1989). In an essay on Basque nationalism, C. Watson writes: “The ultimate symbol of power within a given society is language”(1996; 29). Over the last two centuries, both Lowland Scots and Gaelic have greatly declined in active use at the hands of a diverse array of social forces. Both languages have been identified

as backward or provincial cultural remnants, markers of a society in need of modernising. Friends of my own age have memories of teachers condemning their use of Scots words or pronunciations (“hoose” instead of house, “dinnae” instead of don’t, etc), or tell me their Gaelic-speaking parents or grandparents were punished or humiliated at school for not speaking English.

Thus, both languages have come to occupy a symbolically central place in the Scottish cultural ‘revival’ more generally. The efforts to further their use in literature, in song, in media, and in popular use, are highly politicised attempts to maintain what might be described as a key aspect of Scottishness (Watson 1989; 168). Within the folk-singing scene, both Scots and Gaelic are likewise claimed as “our” languages, and sometimes adopted for song by people who do not speak them otherwise. There is a substantial amount of conversation about the superior expressive capacities these languages have over those of English.

In Edinburgh, Scots is obviously more accessible to most people (including researchers like myself) than is Gaelic. Within some aspects of the Scots literary scene and in some academic circles, there has been an ongoing debate about whether Scots should be considered a dialect or accorded the status of a unique language (see Douglas 1994; Cormack 1997; Wilson 1998). This debate seems to concern itself less with practical use and expression than with a politicised effort to illustrate the Scots’ differing origins and development from those of English. As Billig says:

More is at stake in drawing the boundary of a language than linguistics. The battle for hegemony, which accompanies the creation of states, is reflected in the power to define language... This power resides not merely in the imposition of certain words or phrases, but also in the claim of languages to be languages (1995; 32).

Although most of the people I know would probably argue against the idea that Scots is an entirely different language, they do in many ways speak of it as such (politically and ethically, perhaps, if not linguistically).

Very frequently, friends tell me they feel as though they speak a different language with their family and friends “at home” (where they grew up, generally), than they do at work or when they are dealing with authority figures in Edinburgh. Some people say they feel comfortable switching back and forth between “mainstream” English and broader Scots, and their conversation can blend the two languages seamlessly or slide from one to the other depending upon demand. For others, particularly for working class people who find themselves moving in traditionally middle-class social circles, the cringe factor may still be powerful (see Cormack 1997). As a first year social anthropology tutor, I was confronted with a student from a town in the Central Belt who told me he was considering leaving university. When I asked why, he said “*Edinburgh University’s no for the likes of me. I dinnae speak the right language, ken?*” He did not mean that he was incapable of using standard English, which he was, but that he felt many lecturers and other students believed there was no place for his accent, and perhaps his background, at the university.

The Scottish population is often described as bilingual, and this condition has been a major theme within Scottish literary and cultural studies, again since the 1920’s. Within Scots Renaissance-era literary discourses, however, bilingualism was often portrayed negatively, as a condition which contributes to the previously mentioned split within the Scottish psyche. Such a split inspired, for example, Lewis

Grassie Gibbon to write the following famous passage about his protagonist Chris Guthrie in *Sunset song*:

Two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and learning was brave and fine one day; and the next you'd waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the smell of the earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies... You wanted the words they'd known and used, forgotten in the far-off youngness of their lives, Scots words to tell to your heart how they wrung it and held it, the toil of their days and unendingly their fight. And the next minute that passed from you, you were English, back to the English words so sharp and clean and true—for a while, for a while, till they slid so smooth from your throat you knew they could never say anything that was worth saying at all (quoted by Gunn 1987; 99-100).

For MacDiarmid, the cure for this split consciousness was to try to develop a literary language which borrowed from many regional Scots traditions, and even from Gaelic. For Edwin Muir on the other hand, there could never be a unified Scottish identity unless at least there developed a literary tradition in Scotland's only remaining common language: English:

Scots dialect poetry represents Scotland in bits and patches, and in doing that it is no doubt a faithful enough image of the present divided state of Scotland. But while we cling to it we shall never be able to express the central reality of Scotland... The real issue in contemporary Scottish literature is between centrality and provincialism; dialect poetry is one of the chief supports of the second of these two forces; the first can hardly be said to exist at all. And until Scottish literature has an adequate language, it cannot exist. Scotland will remain a mere collection of districts (1982; 112).

The "bits and patches" that represent the literary use of regional Scots seem to have, in recent years, become considered less of a problem as national identity is no longer thought to require internal homogeneity. At the same time, many contemporary writers like William MacIlvanney, James Kelman, Alasdair Gray, Irvine Welsh, Iain Banks, A.L. Kennedy and Jeff Torrington, among others, still either write in Scots (either literarily or, like Welsh, idiomatically, representing actual speech) or explore

the problematic aspects of a population whose dominant modes of speech differ widely from that which it is forced to use in relation to figures of authority (including representatives of the state). As Welsh said in an interview: “When I started writing *Trainspotting* I wrote in standard English, but it seemed pretentious to be colluding with the lie that the characters actually talked that way” (cited in *San Francisco Examiner*, 11/2/1996).

Like literature, folk-singing sessions and groups often become arenas in which people from various parts of the country compare their regional experiences of music and of Scots language. Sometimes, when singers work collectively to translate particularly opaque Scots lyrics, people draw upon memories of their older relatives using the words in question. Although much of the language to be found in songs is not common in contemporary use, I have often witnessed people incorporating Scots words they had learned from songs into their everyday speech. It is recognised, however, that most traditional Scots ballads have never represented actual speech but are, rather, sung in a more formalised, poetic “ballad-Scots”(Henderson 1983).

Most of the people I know are not consistent in their use of Scots. People who speak more or less a standard English with a Scottish accent will sometimes slip in and out of broader Scots in various contexts, expressing class or local solidarity at some times and class, local or national difference at others. People would not necessarily see themselves as “reviving” the language in so doing, but I would certainly see it as accessing a certain body of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1992) or prestige attributed, increasingly, to Scots. This is a politicised process, which people are at times highly aware of. Language can be used in order to exclude others (who

either cannot adequately understand or do not speak Scots), or it can be used in order to rattle authority figures through a refusal to speak standard English:

“Communication between classes (or, in colonial or semi-colonial situations, between ethnic groups) always represents a critical situation for the language that is used, whichever it may be”(ibid, 40).

The situation with Gaelic language and Gaelic cultural forms is, as may be expected, somewhat different to that of Scots. In 1996-97, I took an introductory Gaelic language class offered by the University of Edinburgh's Continuing Education programme. The class was held weekly on the university campus, and contained roughly 20 people, most but certainly not all of whom were Scottish. I used the class as an opportunity to gain some understanding about the motivations behind Lowland Scots' and non-Scots' desire to learn the language. When I asked people, I was most frequently told derivations of "*Its our national language*" or "*Its part of our culture.*" The "we" to which they referred was not Highlanders but Scots in general. One or two people told me their grandparents had been native speakers and they felt they had a kind of moral obligation to keep the language alive. Again, they told me stories of how their grandparents had been punished or humiliated at school for speaking Gaelic and had subsequently grown up ashamed of the language. On the other hand, one woman, who worked as a tour-guide for groups of foreign tourists, said she felt some knowledge of Gaelic to be essential for her job. "*The tourists seem to expect it,*" she said, indicating that she wanted to conform to a vision of cultural authenticity that was not necessarily her own but that of the tourists.

Within Gaelic renaissance and some wider nationalist circles, Gaelic takes on a symbolic importance as an absolutely essential aspect of Scottishness which must

be kept alive at all costs, although there are only roughly 65,000 native speakers and it is not recognised as an official language (McLeod 1997). MacDonald writes that people involved in the contemporary Gaelic renaissance commonly define Gaelic as “...the language of Scotland--as the language of those from whom the country took its name and as the language which is capable of conferring a distinctive identity upon Scotland”(1998; 36). This coincides with what most of the people in the class told me (although certainly many Lowlanders would thoroughly disagree). For most of the Gaelic learners I met, there was large body of political sentiment lying behind these statements. In many ways, English (and, to a degree, Scots) is deemed to be foreign, the language of the conquering and colonising powers; their nationalism can be seen to reach into an ethnic past for a sense of cultural heritage and authenticity (*ibid*, 38). However, it also imagines a future in which Gaelic language and song have a far more central role in pan-Scottish society: again the Janus face. One man in the class sent his children to the Gaelic-medium unit at Tollcross Primary School in Edinburgh; he can be seen to exemplify the belief that the language must be re-introduced to the younger generations so that it can be carried into the future.

By claiming Gaelic as their own, these learners are not only making assertions about Scottish identity in general but about their own individual formulations of themselves. Like many of the musicians I know, some Gaelic learners told me they felt that by involving themselves in the language, they were in a way making themselves *more* Scottish. I would argue that with the language, we can see, in some ways, the assertion that there is an ethnic aspect of Scottishness (or at least, the type of Scottishness that matters to them). Although activists in the



Scots revival promote its status as a distinct language, Gaelic speakers sometimes argue that Gaelic is the only *true* marker of ethnic difference.

Likewise, in withdrawing from English and Scots, they see themselves to be more closely aligned with Irish Gaelic speakers and, to a lesser extent Welsh and Breton speakers (*ibid*, 34). They are prioritising a heritage as Celts, and as part of a larger Celtic cultural world (itself a highly problematic concept) rather than a British heritage (which, in many minds, is far *more* problematic). As MacDonald (*ibid*) points out, however, the Gaelic language revival has not largely been associated with demands for Gaelic political self-determination. Likewise, the West Highlands (like many rural areas) have not generally voted in favour of the SNP, which many people there believe to represent the interests only of the Central Belt.

Gaelic song occupies a prominent place in the contemporary Scottish cultural revival and not just within the folk scene itself. Bands like Capercaillie and Runrig, which combine Gaelic lyrics with both folk and pop musical styles, have pushed Gaelic song into a more popular realm than that occupied by much folk song. Beyond simply singing in Gaelic, both of these bands sing frequently of the plight of the language and of the Gaels themselves, and of the connections between the Gaels and the land. Their references to the injustices of history and the abuses of the land appeal not only to Gaelic speakers but to Scots of a nationalist leaning more generally. Both of these bands have album titles such as Capercaillie's "The Blood is Strong", which play upon this link between the language, blood, and the land. Writing of Runrig and Capercaillie, Morag Macleod writes:

Both started life as dance bands, but Runrig first and, later, Capercaillie saw the potential for an updating of the Gaelic tradition in singing. Both have achieved this without compromising the roots of the tradition to an unacceptable extent. There is, of course, a great difference between the view

of a Gaelic speaker and those of other Scots in the question of compromising the roots of the tradition, and both of those bands have a strong Highland background. Perhaps one could go as far as to say that it needs to be in the blood, at the risk of sounding racist!(1996; 132).

Macleod does not, however, specify what the differences are between the Gaels' and other Scots' opinions of the bands. What she does do is reveal how powerfully Gaelic speakers sometimes describe their language to run "in the blood", as an ethnic characteristic as it were.

Several other bands have to a degree borrowed Capercaillie's successful formula and have done well within the folk scene, combining Gaelic song, the highland pipes or fiddle, and synthesised keyboard or heavy drum back-beat. However, bands without native Gaelic speakers are in a more difficult position when they come up against opinions like Macleod's:

There is in the 1990's a fashionable interest in Celtic music, and while 'Celtic' seems to have undefined boundaries, singers who see Gaelic as part of it are taking advantage of its popularity, sometimes with little expertise of the language. (To those of us who spoke the language from infancy the sounds can be excruciating!) (*ibid*; 135).

It is, certainly, difficult for non-Gaelic speakers to adopt the language for singing. It is a notoriously difficult language for English-speakers to pronounce correctly and very few singers I know in Edinburgh dare try unless they have spent several years learning the language. Some singers fear native speakers' reaction should they be caught mis-pronouncing the words. As a result, Gaelic song is in many ways deemed to be a distinct or separate aspect of the folk scene, and one which makes more rigorous requirements upon people who want to be involved in it. For example, entry to the singing competitions in the Mod (the annual Gaelic festival which features singing and instrumental competitions) requires proof of fluency in the language; one is not allowed to simply be a good mimic of sounds.

The debates over the use of Gaelic are complex and sometimes highly emotive. As the Gaelic learners I have met illustrate, non-native Gaelic speakers often claim they have just as much right to the language as native speakers (particularly when, in stories about their grandparents, they draw upon the same blood metaphors MacLeod uses). Some singers in Edinburgh have actually told me they would be uncomfortable singing in Gaelic because it *wasn't their* language (thus conflicting with the sentiments of the Gaelic learners, some of whom were also eager to learn Gaelic songs). At the same time, this discomfort also no doubt arises out of the sheer difficulty of the language as much as it does out of a fear that they are not entitled to use the language. Furthermore, although such conflict arises over Gaelic song, it does not tend to do so over other cultural forms, such as instrumental music. Nobody now would question a Lowlander's rights to, for example, play the Highland pipes or Highland fiddle music. It would be unusual for a Highlander to question a Lowlander's right to wear a kilt or claim a tartan.

The folk scene deals, in a myriad of ways, with the themes, motivations and conflicts I have outlined in this chapter. Thus, as we can see, folk musical performance in Scotland should not be seen as an artistic pursuit which operates according to its own internally generated rules, but one which equally arises out of greater sociocultural trends. Political sentiments are not always manifested explicitly in lyrics of 'movements' and 'causes'. More often, they are implicit, underlying the performance and use of traditional music, Scottish languages, and other modes of expression. Some singers feel as though the current scarcity of overtly political songs is a major failing of the contemporary folk scene. Others argue (and I agree)

that political statements can be identified in the pride people now take in this culture.

As Scots fiddler Alasdair Fraser told Sue Wilson from *The Scotsman*:

It always bothered me when folk music was seen as joined at the hip to politics. It seemed such a limiting thing...What's happening now is much bigger, as far as I'm concerned, it's working at a much deeper level, as a source of strength at the level of the psyche, to the point that the music doesn't have to be about fighting to defend the culture anymore--it can be about celebrating it instead (*The Scotsman*: 8/1/1999).

The next chapter will focus more intensely on the uses and experiences of music and performance at the level of the individual participant. Individuals connect themselves with culture, in a very physical way, through performance and thus adopt, personalise, and make meaningful a version (or versions) of what we might call national identity.

## **VI: Performing identity: music and everyday life**

Tom offered me a lift home after a session one night. In the car I asked him how long he had been playing and accompanying traditional tunes on his guitar. He replied that he had begun playing Scottish music only recently, having spent nearly twenty years playing rock, blues and country. *"I've been listenin tae traditional music for a while, but I never thought tae play it, ken? I suppose I was always tryin tae play American music for so long that I never even thought about playin Scottish stuff. But then something changed and suddenly this music started tae seem mair relevant tae me, tae my life than it ever had and I wanted tae play it. Getting involved wi' Scottish music—in some ways it makes me feel mair in touch wi' what's happenin here now."* He then asked me whether I liked living in Scotland. When I said I did, he replied *"Aye, it's a good wee country. Be even better when we get our independence, mind."*

As the previous chapter explored, popular cultural images generated in mass and artistic media may provide a general framework through which individuals can come to understand what they regard to be national culture. National culture and identity is created within such forms of expression. It is also created on a daily basis through particular activities, such as the performance of traditional music. This chapter will examine some of the experiences of music making and performance, and how these experiences can translate themselves into a sense of cultural or national identity.

This thesis situates musical performance in between the individual and the national; music is a catalyst (though only one of many) through which individual

performers involve themselves in an aspect of national culture and, in so doing, continually re-create that culture. For the Scottish musicians I know, Scottish national identity is intricately linked with musical performance. Their nationalism, which again may *or may not* be manifested in particular voting habits, reveals itself in a profound pride in the musical traditions and the types of social memory generated by the music. In other words, national identity is not to be objectively located in particular cultural forms, but is generated through individuals' uses and experiences of them.

We may roughly identify two aspects of musical experience to explore here: the individual and the social. The two are related, of course; musical performance by its very nature always relies upon a complex relationship between individual action on one hand and social dynamics on the other. The first section of the chapter will examine some of the physical and emotional aspects of music making which contribute heavily to the overall quality and effect of the performance. Next, I will examine the ways in which individuals locate themselves within what can be called a musical community and how this perception of community also in turn contributes to the construction of identity. The third section will look specifically at the pub session and propose that the session can be seen, in many ways, to symbolise or embody the imagined community of the folk scene. I will examine the "ideal" session and how this ideal does and does not always manifest itself in reality.

### **Feeling the music: embodiment and emotion in performance**

Tom, the guitarist, is a particular fan of waltzes. A group of us who had been playing together for some time had put together a set of three waltzes, which we

played one night at a session. Tom played a descending bass line, the flute and one fiddle played the melody and the other fiddle played a harmony which sometimes underlay the melody and sometimes soared above it. That night, it came together better than usual, and as we played I saw a wide grin creep across Tom's face.

"Aye," he said, "*that's better than sex.*" He had brought one of the waltzes to the group several months earlier, and as we learned it and started to work it into an arrangement, he said, "*You'll ken when we get it right because I'll start greetin.*"

Tom could not describe what it was about these particular tunes which so appealed to him, nor could he put his finger on what we did right that night in the pub. None of us really knew what we physically *did* differently than we had done all the other times we had practised the set. When one plays well, when one really knows the tune and can play it without thinking, the cognitive awareness of what the fingers are doing on the strings or keys fades into the overall feeling of the music.

Music becomes embodied. The ability to play that music becomes part of the individual's physical and intellectual identity, part of what Bourdieu calls *habitus* (1977). Csordas (1994) reminds us that culture, in general, is not something that is entirely external to us but is both inscribed upon and produced by our physical actions. Like Hastrup (1995), he argues that physical or bodily action conveys cultural knowledge as or more effectively than verbal statements. The same is true for musical knowledge. In his study of Javanese *gamelan* music, Brinner (1995) breaks down musical knowledge into various types: active/passive, intuitive/explicit, and procedural/declarative. He examines the ways in which musicians draw on these different ways of knowing in performance and stresses the importance of the internalisation of musical knowledge. "Explicitness does not necessarily increase



with learning because procedural knowledge can become ‘second-nature’, becoming increasingly internalised and receding from conscious, detailed control to a level where a person can use it automatically (*ibid*; 38).

Becoming a musician requires a long learning process. In the Scottish folk scene, this process largely revolves around actually doing the music. While many folk musicians regard knowledge of music theory as a bonus, it is never a prerequisite. Being a musician, having the right to *identify oneself* as a musician, requires a physical knowledge of music making. The identity literally arises out of the embodied knowledge. As Campbell writes, “What makes a thief a thief and a boxer a boxer is that they *do* something”(1989; 3). Musician, likewise, is a title that comes with doing something: it is an identity always in the making and implicated in the ongoing processes of life.

In the process of learning to sing or play an instrument, the notion of shaping the body is quite a literal one. Learning how to hold oneself and one’s instrument, making the fingers contort into chord shapes that feel, at first, unnatural, developing calluses on the ends of one’s fingers, learning to breathe properly when playing a wind instrument: these are all ways in which the body must be trained. The new musicians I know are all highly conscious of the limitations their bodies impose upon them. As one friend, a woman in her mid-thirties who has been learning fiddle, said to me: “*I have a much harder time than my girls do* (her daughters, aged 9 and 11, are also learning Scottish music and step dancing). *I think my problem is that I’ve been listening to this music for years and I know what it’s meant to sound like. I watch people play and it looks so bloody easy. Effortless, you know? Then I pick up my fiddle and I think “I can do that.” And I can’t. Its like, somewhere between my*

*brain and my fingers, a wire gets crossed or something. My fingers don't do what I want them to do; they don't move fast enough. The girls don't worry about it, they just play. They don't kick themselves when they get it wrong. They're coming on so much faster than I am."*

On the other hand, musicians who have been playing for years tend to spend far less time discussing the demands the music makes upon their bodies; as the body becomes trained, one's awareness of its role becomes more submerged. Sessions populated by highly experienced players tend to be marked by longer sets of tunes: three or four or even five strung together. Transitions between the tunes are smooth. Generally the person who started the set will either simply give the names of the tunes or will call out the key of the next tune. There is far less discussion of the physical process of playing than there is at sessions populated by less experienced players.

For singers, the body is both the musician and the instrument, and they talk even more extensively about the ways in which the body is trained and used in order to produce good sound. Singing sessions are often marked by discussion of technique, particularly in noisy pubs where particular singers have a hard time projecting their voices over the din. Many women struggle in sessions for exactly this reason, and I have encountered frequent complaint that many pub sessions favour men for the simple but fundamental reason that male voices tend to be louder.

I have encountered a lot of discussion, also, about how the experiences of singing at school has discouraged people both from singing in general and from singing Scottish songs in particular. The image of the traditional Scots song as uptight or somewhat embarrassingly old-fashioned seems at least to have been

perpetuated by the mode through which the music has been taught in schools. As one woman, now a keen and talented traditional singer, said: *"We learned a few Burns songs at school. "Green grow the rashies o' " and "Auld lang syne", that was about the extent ae it. We had tae stand there wi' our hands behind our backs, lookin up at the ceiling and making these shrill wee noises. I used tae just mouth the words because I was so afraid o' the sound comin ootae my mooth. A teacher told me my voice 'd break windaes. After that it was years before I'd let anyone hear me sing."*

The style in which much Scots song, particularly Burns, was taught in schools, if it was taught at all, tends to be described as "a Victorian legacy." Many people refer to the image of the upright Victorian, standing next to a piano or harpsichord, warbling in an upper-class English accent. This image dominates many people's impressions of the early revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it seems to have dominated their own early musical education. The same singer said, *"We were ayeways made tae feel as though to sing, one needed tae be terribly prim and proper. We certainly never felt as though it was the music o' the working classes, of the people, ken? Tae sing properly, ye felt as though ye needed tae be someone special."*

The adults I knew who were making their first steps back into singing after these early formative experiences, were finding that they were haunted by these school-era inhibitions. Whether or not they had "naturally good" voices, they often found it hard to overcome the often physically stifling self-consciousness they had about singing. At voice workshops, we were taught that the most important aspects

of folk singing are relaxation and expressiveness, but most people found it more difficult than they might have imagined to let go of a sense of physical reserve.

Many people, particularly those who both sing and play an instrument, have said they find singing a more “personal” or “exposing” mode of performance than playing an instrument. As such, it has the potential also to be more threatening or intimidating. As Roseman writes, “Songs stretch parameters of everyday speech—intonation, duration, accent, stress, timbre, interlock and separation of voices, silences—to extraordinary dimensions, enabling sentiments and values otherwise suppressed or ineffable to take momentary shape”(1996; 233). Likewise, Feld reminds us of the mechanics of hearing one’s own voice: “...hearing and voice are connected by auditory feedback and by physical resonance, the immediate experience of one’s presence through the echo chamber of the chest and head, the reverberant sensation of sound, principally one’s own voice”(1996b; 97). Singers who favour unaccompanied, traditional singing have occasionally said to me that they feel it is easy to “hide behind a guitar”: that a lack of vocal expression is easier to disguise with a pleasing guitar accompaniment.

Most people would acknowledge that the singers they liked best were usually the ones who “*put a lot of guts into it.*” Again, the physical movement and expression leads the audience to believe that the singer really *feels* the song. In fact, some singers see this change of performance style from the more formal to the more personalised as a political gesture as well as an aesthetic one. It is, in their minds, a way of reclaiming the songs from those who sought to rigidify them and treat them as artefacts. Most of the singers I know in Edinburgh cringe when they hear a classically trained voice wrapping itself around a traditional or folk song. They will

frequently describe this style as élitist, as Victorian, and as most certainly “non-folkie”.

Singing style is implicated, too, in the changing ideological and economic trends within the folk scene itself. Several older singers have told me that there has been a substantial change in singing style since the early days of the revival. In the “early days,” people say, there was far less emphasis on breathing and vocal techniques. The revival of the fifties and sixties marked a conscious shift away from the upper-middle class “appropriation” or “improvement” of traditional song and toward a prioritisation of local voices and the connection between the song, the singer, and the social context. This ideological shift marked, too, a change in singing style. People tell me there was a widespread attitude that vocal quality should not matter, and that subsequently, anybody who wanted to sing would. As folk music has become involved in the recording industry and has generated more internationally-known professional performers, vocal quality and performance techniques are becoming more important again. Nevertheless, a good “folkie” voice is of a substantially different quality to that found in other genres.

Still, however, the emphasis is on *feeling* the music, whether one performs in a session or on a stage in front of a large audience. Furthermore, the performer’s own emotional investment in the music tends to generate a more satisfying experience for the audience. Feeling the music incorporates both physical involvement and the emotional experience of it; they are not distinct categories of experience but are, rather, mutually implicated. This connection between practice and emotion also begins to point toward the connection between individual and social experience.

Lyon and Barbalet write:

Feeling must be integrated in the account of both the experience of the world and the understanding of action within it. An understanding of emotion and its foundation in sociality is part of and makes sense of embodied experience, and in turn locates within the body the basis for its agency in the world. Thus, emotion is essential to any conception of social life, as a link between embodiment on the one hand and the practical activity of social life, that is, praxis, on the other (1994; 62).

Blacking was among the first anthropologists to apply this sort of idea specifically to music, which had previously largely been analysed in a symbolic or structural manner. He also began to identify political significance not only in the content of the music but in the nature of its performance and hearing:

...music is overtly political in that it is performed in a variety of political contexts and often for specific political purposes. It is also political in the sense that it may involve people in a powerful shared experience within the framework of their cultural experience and thereby make them more aware of themselves and of their responsibilities toward each other (1976; 28).

Following Blacking, I would argue that an anthropological approach to music-making needs to examine the experiences of the players as well as the listeners, and thus the processes of music-making rather than simply music as a “product” or “form”. This approach differs from much Western writing on the philosophy of music and musical aesthetics (see, for example, Kivy 1990, Maccone 1990, Scruton 1997), in which the absolutely central, corporeal role of the musician is neglected in the attempt to unravel the emotional impact from the organisation of notes themselves. This neglect occurs despite the fact that most musicians themselves prioritise the physical performance of it: “The most important thing in music is the technique of making it--and at the heart of the creative process of the music making, is something which is in the fingers or in the throat of the singer” (Ó Súilleabháin; quoted by O’Connor 1991; 8).

## **Sociable melodies: community and everyday life**

Although mastery of an instrument or vocal technique is mostly an individual process, the experience and effect of musical performance is a social one. Live performance, particularly in intimate settings such as the session is where, they say, folk music is most “legitimately” at home. Of course, individuals listen to recordings or practice at home alone, but even these seemingly solitary acts tend to be geared toward a wider social involvement with the music. In the discourse of the scene, playing alone at home does not comprise “involvement”. Well known listeners who appear at many sessions and clubs are sometimes thought to be involved. Full-fledged involvement, however, means sitting, surrounded by other performers, participating in the collective effort of music making. One’s experience is thus shaped not only by the music itself, but also by interactions with other performers.

Creative inspiration can be described as, in many ways, a collaborative process; borrowing of styles, pieces of music, and of particular types of instrumentation occurs all the time. It is part of the folk process. This process, in turn, creates something akin to what Becker labels an “art world”, in which artistic performance and production draw upon a shared collection of ethical and aesthetic conventions (1982; cited by Martin 1995). Creative licence is somewhat limited by the accepted boundaries of the particular art world at any given time, though over time these boundaries inevitably stretch in new directions.

The art world also operates within particular cultural conventions and associations. The emotional impact of particular styles of music is culturally shaped and appeals to cultural conventions, as indeed is the case with most forms of emotional expression (Lutz 1988). The ability of a musician performing a particular



piece of music to rile or cheer or sadden an audience depends largely upon whether the audience shares his or her cultural frame of reference, political understandings, and aesthetic sensibilities.

The folk musical “world” in Scotland (as in many other places) can be seen as a kind of community, and indeed many of the musicians and singers describe it as such. Similarly, they discuss their own involvements with this community in a way which could be described as the creation of musical genealogies. Unlike a real genealogy, people are not necessarily born into the musical lineage (although there are several well-known musical families) but choose to become members of it: practice creates relationships but is not determined by them. The music is handed down from one generation of performers to the next, and because the transmission of music is still largely oral or aural, people speak extensively about where they have learned pieces or styles, and from whom they have taken inspiration. This type of conversation is both the performers’ way of identifying themselves within the scene and of placing themselves within particular musical legacies; in turn, it serves to strengthen the ties between people in the musical community.

As music is handed down from one performer to the next, so the tradition is carried on and a sense of continuity between present and past is established. That the folk musical tradition has been referred to as “a carrying stream” is evidence to this continuity. As must be reasserted, however, this continuity does not deny the existence or legitimacy of either musical or social change. Individual performers seek both to pay tribute to their sources and influences and to leave their own marks on the tradition as a whole. Tomás Ó Canainn writes of Irish traditional musicians:

His [the performer] sense of the timeless and the temporal together is very much a part of his makeup. He sees his performance in relation to that

of other musicians who have gone before him as well as in the context of the living tradition, and he often refers to this aspect of the music.

His place is among the past generations of musicians as well as among his contemporaries. His performance only has its full meaning when measured against theirs, not necessarily in a spirit of competition: their contribution, though past, is to some extent affected by his. With every performance he is, as it were, shifting the centre of gravity of the tradition towards himself, however minutely, and is re-establishing the hierarchy of performers past and present. (cited in Cowdery 1990; 4).

For people involved in the music, both the music itself and social relationships within the scene are central in the ways in which they formulate their own senses of who they are. Music may be a profession or it may be a hobby, but it is always personally important. Individuals become part of the network of social relationships and political and aesthetic processes which make up the folk scene, and their individual identities are both influenced by and influential within the artistic community. This is how collective identity begins to arise out of individual involvement and experience.

Discussing the emergence of music as a specialised realm of activity in the west, Martin (1995) reminds us that we should not automatically treat it as simply tangential to other aspects of living. He cites Keil, who writes:

Tiv, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Birom, Hausa, assorted Jarawa dialects, Idoma, Eggon, and a dozen other languages from the Nigeria-Cameroons area do not yield a word for music gracefully. It is easy to talk about song and dance, singers and drummers, blowing a flute, beating a bell, but the general terms 'music' and 'musician' require long and awkward circumlocutions that still fall short, usually for lack of abstraction (1979; cited in Martin 1995; 14-15).

In other words music making, like religion in many societies, is not naturally conceptually separated from a vast array of other activities that constitute the business of going through life. Our particular historical development in much of the west has led us to regard music making as the job of a tiny number of specialised performers and music itself as a product of that job. Although it is hardly

questionable that many, if not most, contemporary westerners would claim musical tastes as part of their sense of personal identity, anthropological and sociological studies have long treated music as something which, for most of us, has little to do with our everyday existences. Yet, for many of the people I know in the folk scene, music is one of the most central and vital aspects of their lives. It enters into their daily activities, they carry it in their minds, they likely spend a large amount of their incomes on it, they form most of their friendships through it, and they use it as a basis upon which to make many of their life decisions.

Finnegan also links this social experience into the daily lives of people in the contemporary urban world. Speaking of folk musicians in Milton Keynes, she writes: "Just about all the local folk enthusiasts were people in highly regarded and satisfying jobs. Yet for many of them, it was the 'after hours' folk music activities they seemed to live for" (1989; 69-70). Most of the people I know also regard music and music making to be central to their daily experience of life and to their sense of identity. To call themselves "folkies" reveals far more than the contents of their record collections; it carries implications of a range of social relationships and ethics. It implies an ability to communicate fluently within the language of the musical scene, to understand a variety of shared references, and to recognise the faces populating the pubs and other venues where music happens. Many of my friends tell me they would far rather be known for the music they perform than for what they do in their daytime jobs: "*I just work to pay for my music*" is a statement I have heard time and time again. Even people who enjoy their daytime work or find it satisfying (not all of them do, by any means), do not often make reference to it when in the company of musical friends.

Thus, as I have stated previously, I treat music as part of everyday life, though one that may be socially, physically, and ideologically separated from other aspects of life such as work. It is also largely a public aspect of life, because the social relationships formed within the musical scene tend to be maintained within the recreational spaces in which the music is performed. People meet each other weekly at sessions or folk clubs, they talk about gigs or ceilidhs or gossip about other members of the folk scene. One notices rapidly that conversation very rarely touches on non-musical aspects of life, or does so only after people have known each other in a musical context for a substantial length of time. Within the musical scene, people may be seen to be performing a public aspect of their identity, though I would argue that this public side is no less “real” or vital in the construction of a sense of self.

A sense of community is interlinked with a sense of tradition within the scene. Within the often transient and impersonal urban context, the folk scene provides people often with the sense of being part of something more permanent. Sandy Bell’s pub, Saturday night, for example. Through the thick crowd of bodies in the long, narrow bar, the session at the far end is just audible. Faces turn to check out who comes in the door. Many of them are the familiar ones, which can be seen there most Saturday nights. If they are not there already, friends arrive soon, greeting each other casually even if the meeting is unplanned. Bell’s, as it is called, is one of the symbolic centres of the Edinburgh folk scene and has witnessed the changing population and preferences of the revival since the 1950’s. Bell’s was known for its singing and was a place where folklorists and poets would mingle with the local drinkers. Hamish Henderson still sometimes stands at the bar, drinking nips

of whisky and sometimes offering a song. The “biggies” in the folk world have all been seen in Bell’s over the years.

The pub has developed a reputation as a folk Mecca, based half in reality and half in mythology, that is internationally known. Nowadays its sessions are largely instrumental and the tunes are mostly Irish. This fact is often lamented by singers, but perhaps too this will change again. Bell’s is one of the most enduring folk pubs in Edinburgh, perhaps because it is one of the least self-conscious. Good sessions do not happen there every night, and many nights there is no music at all. But the musical reputation of the place seems well enough established that it survives the dry spells. When the sessions do happen, patrons act as though they are expected and are at home with them. One evening in August, with Festival crowds carousing loudly outside, I met a friend in Bell’s. The pub felt like a refuge from the masses of strangers, with the same tunes and the same faces sitting around the session table. *“It’s like a wee oasis of normal life,”* my friend said, *“like one of those places you always sort of expect to find in a small town somewhere but don’t.”*

There is a strong sense in the folk scene overall of refuge from the urban *anomie*. Moving within the scene, people have friends, have public spaces where they are known and feel comfortable. The sense of community which arises is not akin to the “urban village” ideal criticised by, for example, Hannerz (1980, 1992). The scene is not based around any specific geographic locale within Edinburgh but is formed, rather, around a network of individuals with a common interest in the music. Many of the people involved in the music are incomers to Edinburgh, many of them are single or couples without children. They do not necessarily have kin ties within the city. For many people I have met, the weekly round of sessions, folk clubs, or

ceilidhs is the focus of their social lives. The folk scene provides people with a strategy for creating social links and a sense of belonging.

Not only does the musical community generate social networks, but it also aids in the shaping of ethics and political ideals. It is true that folk music in general tends to attract people with left-wing leanings and a certain amount of disaffection with mainstream popular culture. Drawing on surveys of folk club participants across Britain, MacKinnon generalises: "My view is that the folk scene attracts those who have benefited materially from upward social mobility, but who have not chosen to identify and refuse to aspire to the dominant, competitive, individualistic ethic" (1993; 130). While MacKinnon may well overlook substantial regional variations between, say, England and Scotland or rural and urban areas, his comments are largely, though not entirely, accurate of the Edinburgh scene. Without basing my comments on quantitative evidence, it is still safe to say that the majority of people one meets in the Edinburgh folk scene are middle class in terms of education and training, though are not always necessarily from well established middle class families. Those without formal higher education tend, often, to be substantially self-educated. Generally, people within the folk scene, share an interest in aspects of Scottish history and culture, and would regard themselves as politically progressive.

MacKinnon and other observers of the folk scene (Olson, 1989, Chapman 1994) tend to emphasise the nostalgic tendencies of folk musicians. These writers focus upon the notion that people are drawn to traditional music because they wish to escape the realities of life in late twentieth-century Britain. In other words, they see the folk scene to attract people with powerful pre-set opinions about the world.

I have two criticisms of this sort of analysis. First, it is more useful to regard the prioritisation of ideals such as community and tradition as the construction of an *alternative* sort of modernity, rather than as an escape from it. Second, instead of simply describing the folk scene as a magnet which attracts like-minded people, we must also look at how ethics and political values *arise out of* the musical performance. A discussion of whether the values come before the music may indeed be a chicken and egg scenario, but most people I know would stress to me that the love of the music comes first. Frith articulates this perspective with reference to the American folk revival of the 1930's: "The folk community was the community created by musical performance itself; folk consciousness was the effect of folk singing" (1981; 29). As with any community, mutual sentiment should not be seen as inherent within a group of people but as something that comes out of shared experience and shared time.

### **The session: the imagined community writ small**

We have established that the contexts in which music is made infuse meaning into the music as powerfully as any lyrics or arrangement of notes. When the session is in full swing at the pub and one is surrounded by friends, it is easy to forget the outside world, troubles with work, relationships, the cold outside. The effect can be close to Turner's concept of *communitas* (1985), in which social relationships are not divided by status-roles and one gains a sense of solidarity with the group. As with the *communitas* gained through ritual, one can feel that one's position within the group has been reaffirmed or solidified. At least, this is the *desired* effect, though as Turner (*ibid.*) points out, we never quite reach it (or do so extremely rarely).



*"The session at the Tiq was fantastic last night. You shouldae been there."*

I'm not sure how often somebody has said something like this to me, but it has happened more times than I can count. Other times, I have participated in what I felt to be a very good session one week, only to be disappointed in the same pub the following week. A fantastic session is talked about for a long time afterward, and is something people spend time looking for. It is fantastic when the music "works", when it seems to take on a life of its own and the rest of the world seems to fade at least temporarily into the night.

The fantastic session is a kind of Platonic ideal. While it is based on the reality of *somebody's* experience, there are very few sessions which are fantastic for everybody involved (although there may be particular tunes or songs which *are*). They acquire such legendary status through the telling about them afterward; alcohol-tinted memory can idealise past sessions and push us along in the continuing hunt for future ones. Often, people move from one pub to another in an evening, carting their instruments round with them, on a quest for that elusive session. Almost inevitably, one misses the fantastic session (frequently because one was looking for one elsewhere) and is then punished by being told about it afterward.

To experience the fantastic session, one must participate. One must sing along or play along; one must be involved in the creation of the music. This is what most musicians agree upon, and is the point we miss when we focus entirely on the text or structure of the music, or treat it as a symbol to be unravelled. Feld repeats the sentiments of many musicians I know:

I don't think academics can fully understand the power of the participation idea without ethnography, without dealing with the grounded realities that are the social life of those 'codes' and 'texts' everyone wants to 'read'. That's why so much cultural studies and pop culture theory is

ungroovy to me; it just reads like the idea police sniping from behind blinds and lookouts on the outskirts of town, far from real life action, just declaring 'meanings' rather than fully investigating their genesis and lived lives (in Keil and Feld 1994; 20).

After a particularly harmonious, well-sung, and entirely spontaneous collective rendition of Hamish Henderson's internationalist song "The freedom come all ye" at one singing session, there was moment of complete silence before everyone laughed and clapped, recognising that the session ideal had, if only briefly, been achieved. One man, to whom I'd been speaking before the song, leaned over and said to me very quietly "*That's why I do this.*"

"There is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance" (Anderson 1991; 145). At a session, people are not entirely unknown to each other, but the unisonance, which Anderson applies to the singing of national anthems, is a powerful force. It draws people together, whether over the television or around a session table. It creates the feeling of something shared, of something communicated beyond mere pleasantries. This is what is achieved when the music works, and although people find it difficult to articulate this affect, they seem to be able to agree when it does.

"The surface bootlessness of talking about art," writes Geertz (1983; 95), "seems matched by a deep necessity to talk about it endlessly." He recognises the difficulty in adequately explaining the experience of art (and music in particular, in my mind): "It speaks, as we say, for itself: a poem must not mean but be; if you have to ask what jazz is, you are never going to get to know" (*ibid*; 94). Geertz is not satisfied with the apparent ineffable quality of art, the sense that it can communicate "things otherwise uncommunicable" (S. Cohen 1991; 191). Taking his usual

interpretative approach, Geertz attributes its efficacy to its use of collectively known and accepted symbols.

Scottish and Irish music, both instrumental and sung, does employ symbols that are known and held to be meaningful to people, although following from later symbolic approaches taken by writers like Stromberg (1986) and Cohen (1985, 1994), I would argue that the meanings actually attributed to these symbols by individuals are myriad. However, Geertz's deliberate down-playing of the role of practice neglects what is, in my mind, perhaps the most essential aspect of musical performance: the sensual experience. The power of this music comes in its ability to marry the use of culturally meaningful symbolic or aesthetic forms with what can be an intense physical and emotional experience; for both the performer and the listener, the music engages with the senses and has the ability to lift a person temporarily out of the more mundane realm.

It is for this reason that artistic performance, and theatre in particular, has been compared by many writers, most notably Schechner and Appel and their contributors to the book *By means of performance* (1990), to ritual. These writers draw heavily on Turner's three-stage model of the ritual process, in which individuals are carried from one variety of daily existence, through a liminal or transformative experience in ritual, and placed back into daily life altered. In the same volume, Turner himself writes:

...ritual and its progeny, the performance arts among them, derive from the subjunctive, liminal, reflexive, exploratory heart of the social drama...[particularly] its third, redressive phase where the contents of group experience are replicated, dismembered, refashioned, and mutely or vocally made meaningful (1990; 13).

In a functional sense, then, ritual and artistic performance are seen to strengthen or reaffirm collective values and social ties; they are the renewers of community. As Abner Cohen writes, “Music, literature, dance and other arts are autonomous aesthetic forms, but are simultaneously also techniques that develop and maintain the cultural forms of social relationships”(1983;7).

Bourdieu, on the other hand, argues that one cannot theoretically treat music in the same way one treats drama or more discursive types of artistic expression:

Music is the ‘pure’ art par excellence. It says nothing and has *nothing to say*. Never really having an expressive function, it is opposed to drama, which even in its most refined forms still bears a social message and can only be ‘put over’ on the basis of an immediate and profound affinity with the values and expectations of its audience (1979; 19).

I would argue that while this can sometimes be true, that (even excluding song) much of the significance musical performance *does* rely heavily upon the values and expectations of the audience. Scottish traditional music bears political significance because many of its listeners and performers attribute a political significance to it, or rather to the particular organisation of sound that comprises what is deemed to be Scottish traditional music. For a listener unfamiliar with Scotland’s political situation and unaware of the positions Scottish cultural forms have occupied over a long and turbulent history, this political significance will be absent.

The “performance as ritual” approach is in some ways preferable to that of Geertz, in that although it still accredits a central role to cultural symbols, it acknowledges the psychological experience of the individual. The notion of *communitas* is perhaps the most suitable theoretical attempt at explaining the emotional experience that can occur during musical performance. However, as Fabian (1990) points out, we must move away from a belief in the all-encompassing

and pre-existing nature of a culture into which individuals need to be socialised. Neither Turner's social drama theory nor Geertz's symbolic one makes any attempt to understand where the symbols, and the culture from which they arise, come from. In Bell's words, the comparison between ritual and performance does not "...effectively break free of a theoretical framework in which activity is seen as dramatising or enacting prior conceptual entities in order to reaffirm or re-experience them"(1992; 38).

A straightforward comparison between ritual and performance leaves us in danger of overlooking the sociocultural particularities of individual rituals and performances (*ibid*, 43). While it is possible to see certain aspects of folk musical performance as *ritualised*, the audience singing along with well-known choruses for example, folk performance in general is not ritual. It is not carried out, necessarily, on special occasions or in order to actualise particular aspects of symbolic belief. Although, for example, most people do connect the music symbolically to a sense of Scottishness, that sense of Scottishness alone does not drive them to perform the music; the music itself is the main motivation and reason for the performance. If they did not like the music or enjoy performing it for its own sake, they would find other ways (as most Scots do) to perform Scottishness.

Furthermore, and this I believe to be the greater criticism, the performance-as-ritual approach treats the performance as a unique or occasional event which supplements or transforms daily life *rather* than as an element of that daily life itself. While this may be the case for some theatre or for yearly or seasonal performances, it is not entirely applicable to the session or other more regular types of musical practice. "*What would I be without music,*" one of my friends remarked once, "*I'd*

*be a pretty dull person, that's what. I was too busy wi' work for a while so I gave up some of my singing commitments, and I started tae feel like I'd a great big hole in my life. I don't need tae do gigs and I certainly wouldnae want tae do it for a living, but singing is part of me. That's how I say I'm a singer, not just someone who sings once in a while."*

Folk festivals, on the other hand, could likely be more easily treated as ritual, in that they are specific events, separated in time and space from everyday life. At a festival, people will very often play, and drink, non-stop or until they can simply endure no more. There is no space off-limits for the musician at the festival: the campsite and the street-corner become stages for impromptu sessions. In fact, many people who frequent folk festivals do not regularly buy tickets for the concerts, but rather go for the sessions and the atmosphere. This is even more the case in Ireland, where people will cross the country to attend a festival, or *fleadh*, for the party, often with no interest at all in the music itself. If the festival is successful, it will create a carnival atmosphere in which identity politics are performed in the street in a variety of ways (see Mintz 1997), although the success of a Scottish festival is highly contingent upon the whims of the weather. *"I got nae sleep, I think I've killed half my brain cells and pickled my liver, I havenae had a shower in four days, and there's a few new dents in my guitar. It was brilliant but I couldnae do it every weekend,"* is how one my friends replied when I asked him about a festival from which he'd just returned. Festivals, however, are substantially different to the weekly pub session in Edinburgh. These are not necessarily special events; they are just part of the weekly schedule.

Like Fabian (1990), an emerging generation of anthropologists of music have suggested that rather than seeing performance as a way in which society renews itself, we should see it as a way (though of course not the only way) in which individuals enact and thus realise society. This is not to say that something entirely new is created with each performance but that society, or community, must be seen as an ongoing process which must be continually added to, shaped, and acted upon by individual actors. Waterman (1991), similarly, characterises performance as the link between the individual and an ever-changing repertoire of cultural forms. Influences travel across this link in both directions.

Following this notion, Anthony Seeger (1991) writes that musical performance in non-literate societies, such as the Suyá in the Brazilian Amazon, with whom he studied, is a way in which people remember their history and create their own vision of who they are. "I argue," he writes, "that members of some social groups create their past(s), their present(s) and their vision(s) of the future partly through musical performances" (1991; 23). I agree with Seeger, though would posit that the same is true in literate societies. I thus regard musical performance as a means through which people both express, and more importantly, create identity. When people use Scottish music in order to perpetuate social memory of particular aspects of Scottish historical experience, or when they situate their musical performance within a wider Scottish popular cultural revival, they are creating a national identity that is relevant to their own lives. In a very real way, they are not just imagining but performing the community.

Long running sessions can become institutions and generate a sense of permanence in participants' lives. Going further, I believe it is possible to translate



this sense of social permanence into what might be seen as the perception of cultural roots. The format of the session, with its emphasis on face to face interaction, non-amplified music and the relaxed distinction between performer and audience, is described by some people I know as the “traditional” way in which this music should be performed. By perpetuating the session, many musicians see themselves to be carrying the tradition on. The session is seen to facilitate the continuation of the oral/aural tradition and as the format through which the music continues to be part of the community.

Of course, no session is ever permanent and neither is it entirely free of social division, hierarchy and disagreement. As with any artistic community, the folk scene generates a range of internal diversities and, thus, conflicts. The sense of *communitas*, and of long-lasting stability, is short-lived. The harmonious musical community is very much an imagined one at most times; the reality is that the scene consists of a wide variety of individuals, each with tastes, preferences, agendas, economic needs, and so on.

One particular singing session I frequented for roughly two years has lately disintegrated and been more or less abandoned. Months earlier, one of the other regulars (a single man, aged about 50), said *“What I like about this session is that its always the same. You leave one week and come back the next and pick up where you left off. It’s a tremendous comfort to me that some things don’t change. I could not come for four or five months, and then come back and there’d be Ian sitting in the corner singing the same old tune he was singing last time. Deja vu or what? If they decided to turn this pub into one of those dreadful theme bars, I’d have to shoot myself.”* Ironically, this man became frustrated with his own singing and stopped

going to the session not long afterwards. It was in actually sitting in the midst of the session in full swing that the feeling of permanence arose, but the fact is, of course, the session did change. New people came with different musical agendas, which drove away some of the older regulars. Some people got jobs that required them to be up early in the morning and thus they stopped coming as often. As the faces changed, so too did the nature and feeling of the session; eventually it died out.

The existence of a session is also subject to the whims of the pub or the brewery. For example, the Tron Ceilidh House in Edinburgh, which has been one of the most central folk pubs for several years (long enough for the sessions and the resident folk club to become institutionalised), has recently shut down so the brewery can turn it into a student theme pub. The folk club and sessions, along with other weekly jazz and blues performances, have been displaced. In the Edinburgh folk scene, the closing of the Tron is described not simply as the loss of a particularly nice venue but as a disgrace, a betrayal by the brewery: a valued music venue (and thus perhaps the very existence of the clubs and sessions) sacrificed to shameless capitalism.

“The session” sometimes seems to acquire a life of its own in many minds. My overwhelming impression is that the sense of permanence and community is something many people seek. As a session becomes established, it works its way in to “the tradition” generally, and becomes something comfortable and familiar (even if it is not always “fantastic”). This may be why the dying out of a session can cause real bitterness and disappointment.

Similarly, things are not always what they seem within the session itself. There are many reasons why the ideal session does not happen often. Munro argues

that the contemporary Scottish folk revival is more “truly demotic” than other musical scenes and that it has helped to “break down the barriers caused by artistic chauvinism of any kind”(1996; 180). A spirit of egalitarianism is the major ethic of the folk scene in general, but it most certainly does not always manifest itself in practice.

Folk musical performances, like performances anywhere, must always be seen as occasions where individual and social desires and expectations meet. Sometimes this meeting is harmonious, but often it becomes a trigger for the display of both personal and aesthetic conflicts. Sessions reveal such conflicts in both subtle and overt ways: singers not applauding when someone sings a song they deem to be “out of place” or uninteresting, one instrumentalist deliberately speeding up a tune started by another, people talking loudly while someone is singing or playing. In some cases, individuals may even walk out of sessions if they do not particularly like other people there. I have even heard of one musician threatening to take another (a young man who plays his fiddle with more machismo than skill) “outside”. Individuals are seldom verbally reprimanded for breaches of session etiquette (which is, in any case, variable from session to session and never set in stone), but most people are highly aware when breaches take place. Speaking again of group performance in Java, Brinner writes:

This gives rise to a drama played out in myriad ways with results that vary from homogeneous blend to insistent independence. Value is variously placed on competitive interplay, clear-cut hierarchy, or “selfless” bending and blending, to name a few contrasting choices that have overt aesthetic and social dimensions. Here, more than anywhere else, it may be difficult to filter out the “nonmusical”. In many situations, other senses of self, such as professional pride, economic competitiveness, and personal dislikes affect musicians’ judgements and performance (1995; 290).

In Edinburgh, the main source of conflict arises between, on the one hand, a powerful ideology of musical and artistic egalitarianism, and on the other a competitive social hierarchy in what must be seen as an increasingly professionalised musical realm. Although a sense of community can still be said to prevail in many parts of the folk scene, I have also met a large number of people who have felt marginalised because their skills are not of “professional” standards or because they have the “wrong” style. Edinburgh is home to a large number of professional folk musicians, many of whom regularly play in pub sessions. This fact gives rise to a widespread opinion, both within Edinburgh and outside of it, that Edinburgh sessions are élitist and snobbish. It is perhaps less snobbery than it is simply that professional musicians like to play with others of their own standard, and that the increased professionalisation of the folk scene triggers a conflict with the egalitarian ideology.

This is not just the case in Edinburgh, however. As Stokes writes of sessions in Ireland: “The emphasis...is very much on an idealised spontaneity” (1994; 109). Well established session players know how to maintain an aura of informality in their performances (indeed, these qualities are part of the performance). Yet, when a newcomer arrives and tries to join in, she or he is very often met with unspoken but obvious disapproval or even hostility. Regular, professional session leaders will often populate sessions with their friends or fellow band members. They will play sets of tunes that may sound spontaneous or even improvised but have, in fact, been rehearsed to near perfection; in such sets, there is little scope left for the casual player. The standard of musicianship at many sessions is set by professional performers and intimidates or excludes many amateur musicians.

I recently met a friend who is a young professional instrumentalist in an up-and-coming Scottish band. We were talking about the big Celtic Connections music festival which takes place in Glasgow every January. The festival draws well known folk performers from Scotland, Ireland, England, North America and Europe and combines big concerts with workshops and ceilidhs. What it lacks, however, is the all-involving session scene that happens at other festivals. Although it holds a so-called festival club at one of the city's hotels, the late-night sessions are populated only by the professional musicians who are involved in the concerts. Amateur instrumentalists and singers have little opportunity to do more than listen. *"It's all kind of hypocritical,"* my friend was saying, *"Because the best sessions take place behind doors that are closed to the public. Natalie MacMaster and Alasdair Fraser<sup>1</sup> and all sorts of people are playing there and the public doesn't even get to listen, even though they've paid to get into the Festival Club."* Celtic Connections has been much criticised by people I know for embodying the increasing division between amateur and professional performers.

Most players in Edinburgh know more or less which sessions they feel comfortable trying to join. The more closed ones, populated largely by professionals, are not necessarily off limits to newcomers but are subtly exclusive. Newcomers unknown to the established performers must be extremely confident in their musical abilities and somewhat brass-necked in order to join in such sessions. My friend Graham, an excellent penny-whistler and singer/guitarist, has remarked to me many times about his own difficulties in joining sessions. Having met him at one pub in which there is a weekly Irish session, I watched him sitting in a corner, at the

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<sup>1</sup> Two of the top fiddlers in the Celtic fiddling world. MacMaster is a young Cape Breton fiddler from a well-established musical family. Fraser is a Scot, now based in California.

edge of a session in full swing. He told me he'd been coming to that particular session for six months and still didn't feel comfortable enough to sit down at the table with the regulars, although his abilities were certainly up to their standards. Instead, he made a little space for himself at the edge and played away, hoping one day they would invite him to sit down. I asked him why he didn't sing a song, and he looked surprised. *"Oh no!"* he replied. *"Nobody sings here. Well, Cathal McConnel does, but he's the only one who can get away with it. I wouldn't dare."* Cathal McConnel is a near legendary Irish flautist/singer with the well-known Edinburgh-based band Boys of the Lough.

When the newcomer does sing or play tunes the others do not know (such as playing Scottish tunes in a predominantly Irish session or visa versa), the others tend to sit and wait quietly for it to finish. Sometimes they will make an effort to join in; very often they will simply wait and then continue with their own playing. They may acknowledge the effort, or they may not. They may not even involve themselves in conversation with the new person. Their sessions are not the "anything goes" ideal the folk scene in general likes to boast of; they are fine, polished performances. I have seen many new faces come into these sessions and eagerly take a chair around the table, only to leave again frustrated and disillusioned

Edinburgh also has a number of open sessions that welcome anyone with a reasonable level of ability, although they may attract or even be led by professionals or semi-professionals. These sessions tend to take place in less central pubs and, perhaps unfortunately, are not the ones newcomers and visitors generally first find their way into. In fact, the paradox is that you have to know a little about the scene or have a few contacts in it before you even become aware that these more

welcoming sessions exist (many of them are not listed in the weekly “Gig Guide” which advertises musical events in Edinburgh).

Edinburgh still is, in many ways, the centre of the Scottish folk revival. Musicians from other parts of the country, and from Ireland, settle here and become parts of Edinburgh-based bands. As a result, the city has probably a far larger concentration of professional singers/musicians than one would find elsewhere. Many Edinburgh audiences, thus, come to expect to hear highly accomplished singers and instrumentalists, despite the *ideological* prioritisation of accessibility and populism.

Because they draw performers from all parts of Scotland, Ireland and elsewhere, sessions in Edinburgh reveal a conglomeration of regional styles. Often these mix to produce a vibrant blend and sometimes they are at odds with each other. The Scottish/Irish divide in instrumental sessions is sometimes source of friction between players. So too is the style of singing. Particular singing venues, like the Royal Oak, are welcoming of all sorts of song, from unaccompanied ballad singing to Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel. Other sessions are far more “controlled” by leaders or prominent performers. Political song, once the mainstay of the folk-song revival, is now sometimes treated with a notable lack of interest by people who prioritise traditional song.

I have taken part in many sessions in which these various types of conflicting interests have manifested themselves. The result can be frustrating indeed, and anything but the open and democratic process folk idealists like to portray. Some players or singers dominate while others are effectively silenced. People talk and shout over particular performers while giving their complete attention to others; often



the ability to command an audience, perhaps particularly of other musicians resides not so much in talent but in the ability or willingness to perform what people expect to hear. Particular styles of performance are marginalised because they are deemed not to “fit” into the nature of a particular session. The frustration arises largely because the rules of each session are different and, for the most part, they remain unspoken. While some session leaders will specify for each singer to do two songs in a row or for tunes to be repeated twice or three times, preferences of style and demands of skill are never uttered aloud. It is left up to participants to figure out the other rules as they go along.

I have been told of sessions elsewhere (in Ireland and England) which set down specific rules regarding the material performed and instrumentation: “Irish only” or “traditional” only or unaccompanied singing only. In Edinburgh, I have never encountered this. However, there is unspoken discrimination along many lines. Perhaps the most obvious example of discrimination in many folk musical formats is along gender lines, although again the scene’s ideology actively opposes and even sometimes denies gender hierarchies. Although a case could be made that the folk music affords women more possibilities for success than do other genres such as rock or jazz, it is still the case that the scene is dominated at most levels by male performers. This is true despite the fact that, judging from the attendance of instrumental classes offered by the Adult Learning Project, there appear to be roughly equal numbers of men and women embarking upon learning the instruments.

The majority of sessions are dominated by male instrumentalists or singers. Many singing sessions prioritise the performance of loud, thumping songs accompanied by guitar; a large number of female singers have told me that they feel

intimidated or unable to make themselves heard over a chorus of male voices.

Although Scottish traditional singing has long been the domain of both men and women and nobody is overly concerned about women singing songs in the male perspective or vice versa, the more contemporary combination of singer/guitarist tends still to be a predominantly male one. *"If you are a man, you're simply described as a singer/guitarist,"* says one of my friends, *"but if you're a woman, you're always a female singer/guitarist. The guitar is pretty much a male thing. I get sick of guys telling me I'm not bad for a lassie."*

Many female performers have said they feel that their performances are expected to be musically polished while men are allowed a certain amount more leeway for mistakes or imperfections, provided they are made up for by good humour or "craic". Women are often not "expected" to be good guitarists, but they are expected to have flawless voices; men on the other hand are allowed to have coarse or "characterful" voices (and while this may not always be the case in individual minds, a scan of the most popular folk recordings substantiates this). This division of material and vocal quality is also to an extent reinforced by the popularity of bands like Capercaillie or Altan (from Donegal), both of which feature women with pure, sweet voices backed up by otherwise entirely male bands. I would argue that this division has arisen largely in the context of the contemporary folk revival, which is now forced to operate at least partially according to a global definition of what "Celtic" music should sound like.

Likewise, particular instruments acquire gendered connotations although, again, these are not often verbally acknowledged. The dominant instrument in Scottish instrumental music, the fiddle, is played fairly equally by men and women

although the ranks of successful professional fiddlers tend to be predominantly male. Other stringed instruments, such as the mandolin, the bouzouki, and the banjo are far more obviously a male domain. While these instruments are increasingly popular in sessions, I have only seen a tiny handful of women playing any of these. Those most symbolically Scottish of instruments, the pipes (although not tremendously commonly used in the folk scene) are almost hegemonically male.

Furthermore, the simple fact that sessions take place in pubs, some of which are not otherwise welcoming to lone females, is something many women find limiting. *"Try walking into a pub full of old boys and sitting down at the session,"* I was told once, *"Aye they'll gie you order alright, but they're lookin' at your tits rather than hearin' your voice."* Many women refuse to let the male environment of the session put them off, but overcoming a sense of intimidation well enough to join in equally generally involves becoming an honorary "lad" and engaging with male performers on their terms.

Likewise, although many "folkies" would claim to celebrate notions of working class community and history, some people from working class backgrounds have told me they often feel they have "the wrong accent" or not enough formal education to fit truly into some aspects of the scene. Again, these feelings arise *despite* an anti-élitist ideology that still pervades the scene. However, it could be possible to attribute these perceptions of snobbery within the scene to the fact that it does, in fact, attract a more diverse following than observers such as Chapman or MacKinnon reveal. Compared to that of sport or many other social recreational activities, the population of the folk scene is likely less segregated along class *or* gender lines. I have never known folk musicians or singers to make comments

which are intentionally offensive to members of the working class or to condemn anyone's accent. Rather, the reverse is often the case, in which middle class backgrounds or accents are deliberately downplayed.

Having pointed out some of the internal divisions within the folk scene, it should be born in mind that such dynamics and conflicts inevitably occur in any artistic circle. They are perhaps magnified in the minds of some folk performers because the scene maintains such a strong ideal of equality and populism, which sometimes does and sometimes does not manifest itself in practice. The ideal remains in place because it *is* felt to be true, at least some of the time, by the people involved. It should be said that most performers tell me how much they enjoy the social aspects of the scene and how central the relationships they have formed within it have become in their own lives. These relationships rank alongside the music itself as a motivation for many people's continued involvement. The two following chapters will focus more intensely on the material performed in the folk scene and the cultural themes which arise from it.

## **VII: Folk Music and social memory: conceptualising class and gender**

“History, it could be argued,” writes Olivia Harris (1995; 104), “is local knowledge *par excellence*.” In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which musical performance is used as a tool for remembering versions of the past. As such, I argue that the importance of what is remembered lies not so much in the objective truth it may reveal about past events but in the ways it can reveal understandings about the present (Fentress & Wickham; 1992). One of the most easily recognised aspects of cultural nationalisms is their tendency to draw upon the past, upon history, in order to create a sense of shared roots and experience among the population (see, for example, Smith 1981, Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983, Hobsbawm, 1990). As I argued in the preceding chapter, these perceived roots are a major element in the construction of what people feel to be a community. Indeed, many of the musicians and singers I know engage in this sort of discourse and have told me they believe the music to connect them with these roots in a particularly effective manner. For them, and for many other people who may not perform or even frequently listen to this music, the music speaks as a powerful symbol of Scottish historical experience.

With McCrone (1992, 1998) I challenge the notion that Scottish nationalism is entirely a backward-looking process and would argue that the people I know support political change primarily because it holds the potential for a more economically and culturally satisfying *future*. Although it is frequently commented that nationalism focuses upon a nostalgic sense of loss of community or social order

(Harris 1995), it is important to understand that present actions and future hopes also arise out of this loss: thus the “Janus-faced” nature of nationalism (Nairn 1977, 1997). The social memory generated by such nationalism thus is used, very often, as a metaphor for present processes.

This chapter examines some of the uses of folk song and singing in the construction of social memory and what might be called a people’s history. Crucially, this social memory parts ways with the bulk of Scottish historiography that is dominated by accounts of military campaigns, governmental struggles, and religious upheaval. Certainly, there are well-known songs of battle and warfare, although the more popular of these focus upon the victims of war rather than the heroes.<sup>1</sup> However, as people sing and speak of Scottish history, the images they evoke are more of the farmyard, the factory and the tenement stair than they are of the battlefield or the royal court. Furthermore, their histories are powerfully infused with ideas about both class and gender. While people do refer to “Scottish history” in general, it is important to examine how aspects of class and gender shape both what people choose to remember and the ways in which they portray those memories.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first examines some theoretical uses of the concept of social memory and proposes that social memory (and thus, national history) is made personally relevant through particular types of performance. Secondly, I turn to the singing of songs about the coal mining industry in order to examine the construction of a class history. Finally, I look at the way

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most popular war song in the folk scene is Eric Bogle’s “No man’s land”, which is seen as an archetypal anti-war song.

some of the women I know use song in order to explore the gendered aspects of Scottish history and to address the profound absence of female voices in writing about Scottish historical experience.

I will argue that, through song, people connect themselves with what they deem to be “their” histories. For example, many of the people I know have at one time or another told me about the experiences of family members, grandparents or great aunts and uncles, or in some cases parents, in the industries that are often regarded as central to the modern Lowland Scottish identity: the mines, the mills, the fisheries and the shipyards (among others). I gained a powerful sense that people want to find their own connections with these industries which are now nearly or entirely defunct, and thus with what they believe to be a people’s history of Scotland. Throughout the course of many conversations, interspersed by songs, I began to realise that many people claim an affiliation with particular social groups (i.e. an industrial or rural working class) through social memory *rather* than through their present economic or professional status. Although song texts, or lyrics, are important carriers of meaning and sentiment, the context in which the songs are sung and the ways in which the songs are employed by individual singers are equally significant. I will also examine the cases in which I have encountered conflicting sentiments in response to the singing of particular songs.

### **Acts of remembrance: the creation of social memory**

Prior to discussing songs in particular, I will briefly outline some of the theories which attempt to comprehend the processes through which social memory is



created, sustained, and continually altered. Social sciences have become increasingly concerned, in the last two decades, with the ways in which history itself has been constructed, or invented as it were. Volumes such as Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) edited collection have involved themselves in the exercise of deconstructing practices or "traditions" that are thought to have connections with an ancient past but which are, really, relatively modern inventions. Merely saying this, however, doesn't tell us much, for all traditions have been in some way or other invented.

Subsequently, we have turned our thoughts to the ways in which our current understandings of the past are invented or created, and how these in turn inform our present positions. Cairns Craig writes:

The historian can only 'compose' a history about events which have a 'composed' order: but what this means is that there is always something else beyond the boundaries of what I will call *composed* history, a *counter-historical* flux of human events which, though 'buried in silence and oblivion' [he takes the quote from David Hume's *History of England*] as far as narrated history is concerned, are not without an immediate--and potentially destructive--history of their own (1996; 68).

Here Craig challenges the notion that historical events and processes can be adequately documented in a linear fashion, one leading on from another. This "counter-history" exists, for Craig's particular discussion, in the realm of nineteenth-century Scottish Romantic literature (and most notably that of Sir Walter Scott), and comes in the form of an imaginative journey into what *could have* happened. What Craig is proposing, in other words, is that creative genres such as literature, provide us with the means to challenge apparently authoritative historical accounts. Similarly, deCerteau (1984; 16) suggests that popular culture (including storytelling) has the capability to divide conceptual space into two realms, one "a socio-economic

space” marked by the struggle between powerful and poor, and the other “a utopian space” which upsets or reverses relations of power. The same, I believe, could be said for folk song.

Although he does not use the concept of social or collective memory, Craig’s discussion draws upon similar notions. It admits that in social life there are ideas or imaginings about the past that are not easily slotted into a linear account of history. The French sociologist, and member of the Durkheimian school, Maurice Halbwachs is generally considered to have set the precedent for more contemporary studies of collective or social memory (see Connerton 1989, Coser 1992, Jarman 1996). Departing from a psychological or physiological stance which prioritised the individual aspects of remembering, Halbwachs argued that our memories are shaped by commonly held symbolic codes. Even memories of highly personal events were thought to be filtered through a socially-conditioned mind (Halbwachs; in Coser 1992). Likewise, he believed that groups maintained a sense of identity, or cohesion, to use a more functionalist term, through this continual process of creating memory.

Subsequent writers have focused more intensely on the practical ways in which this process of remembering is facilitated. What becomes important, then, is not the fact that memory *is* social but the processes of remembering. Likewise, it is important to try to come to terms with the ways in which people form connections with or remembrances of events that they have not personally experienced. In *The past is a foreign country*, Lowenthal (1985) focuses largely on the ways in which history is both memorialised and reconstructed materially, through architecture,

literature, visual art, monuments, and the like. He draws more of a dividing line between personal memory and history than Halbwachs:

History differs from memory not only in how knowledge of the past is acquired and validated but also in how it is transmitted, preserved and altered.

We accept memory as a premise of knowledge; we infer history from evidence that includes other people's memories. Unlike memory, history is not given but contingent; it is based upon empirical sources which we can decide to reject for other versions of the past (1985; 212-213).

For Lowenthal, the past is a foreign country because it is objectified or seen as "other" (as Harris (1995) puts it) by people or organisations directly involved in memorialising it. Subsequently, it can be packaged and sold as "heritage".

Certainly this is the case some of the time and for some people. I would argue that although much of what we remember, as individuals, may be seen as separate from a social history, there is also a large amount that is both memory and history. It is both individual and contingent; our own recalled experiences interact with what other people tell us about their experiences of the same event or time and thus we may feel as though we are communicating about shared experience. In some ways, the past is powerfully *subjectified*; it is made personal and we come to feel as though it is part of who we are as individual members of particular communities or groups. Conversely, by claiming to share these memories, we maintain our place in those communities, even if we have perhaps physically distanced ourselves. By examining the ways in which performances, rituals and other types of practical activities shape memory of the past, we can begin to understand that history, in many ways, is embodied (Boyarin 1994).

Rather than distinguishing memory from history, Connerton (1989) makes a differentiation between memory and the historian's task of historical reconstruction.

In other words, he does not draw a firm line between the actual categories of history and memory but between the active reconstruction of a linear chain of events (the historian's job) and the processes through which groups of people formulate what they feel to be shared memory of those events. As Neil Jarman (1997) writes,

...remembering must be an active process in which memories have to be worked on and used in order to be maintained. Memories, as a medium for understanding the past, are a part of the wider cultural practices that are continually being adapted and rephrased to meet the needs of the present (1997; 5).

Both Jarman and Connerton focus upon public events and rituals as ways in which individuals attain a sense of continuity with the community and with the community's past. Both of these writers focus upon the creation and maintenance of social memory in communities which are highly self-consciously drawing politicised and rigid boundaries around themselves: Jarman on the two communities in Northern Ireland and Connerton largely on the Nazis. In these cases, social memory is created, or perhaps enforced, through extremely overt and public displays and performances as well as through more subtle and insidious means. One is integrated into the group, and given a sense of collective memory, through participation in orchestrated activities such as parades. Although the meanings of symbols do always change, as Jarman notes, the public questioning and re-formulating of symbols is not, largely, a democratic process in these contexts. While mass events certainly have the capacity to be emotionally overwhelming, they are not always guaranteed to create a lasting or permanent impact on everyone involved. One may or may not be caught up in the spirit of the moment but such feelings often fade over time and do not necessarily determine or alter one's sense of personal or social identity.

Perhaps an example, by way of an anecdote, would be helpful here.

### *The Rolling Stone's Edinburgh gig*

It was about 1:00 am on the 30th of November, 1996. The three hundred or so people in the Edinburgh Assembly Rooms stood still, sweating and breathing hard after the exertions of vigorous 'Strip the Willow' we'd all just danced. One of my friends was still holding a handkerchief to his lip; he'd been hit by a flying elbow during the dance. But he was laughing. *"It's not a proper ceilidh unless you come away with bruises,"* he was saying. I'd have a few the next morning myself. The band was calling for everyone to take hands in a large circle for the traditional end-of-ceilidh rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne'. People moaned a little and wiped their palms on their thighs, but took hands nevertheless and a circle formed around the perimeter of the dance floor.

*"Well, tomorrow is St. Andrew's Day, in case any of you had noticed,"* announced the band's caller and there was a general noise of agreement from the dancers. He continued, *"and in case any of you have forgotten, there's the wee matter of a certain stone being brought back."*

This inspired a cheer. The Stone of Destiny-- the stone upon which a succession of medieval Scottish kings had been crowned-- was being brought back to Scotland after seven hundred years of residence (or captivity as some would say) below the throne in Westminster Abbey. The Conservative government's decision to bring the Stone back to Scotland had been followed by several months of debate over where it should be housed. Finally, Edinburgh Castle had been selected over the

palace at Scone, from which it had originally been taken by Edward I. For weeks, a hum of excitement, argument and rhetoric had been buzzing around the Scottish press in anticipation of the big event, now just a few hours away. I thought of a column I'd seen in *The Scotsman* three weeks earlier:

*"We're getting the Stone back"* it had said. *"They can have the following: Gazza. Absentee landlords; redundant nuclear submarines; tripe; Jimmy Hill; lad culture; Wings' 'Mull of Kintyre'; The Sun; Buckfast tonic wine."*

*"Of course, they're putting it in Edinburgh Castle,"* the band's caller continued, *"which means we have to pay a fiver each to see it."*

There was an amount of booing and hissing.

*"So Michael"* [referring to Michael Forsyth, then Secretary of State for Scotland who had engineered the return of the Stone], *"if you're listening (which I doubt), you can keep your Stone. We don't need it anymore because we've got our tunes. Come on people, let's hear you sing."*

The crowd laughed and cheered loudly before launching into song.

The next morning (or rather, later in that same one) I made the mistake of getting onto a bus to get up to the Royal Mile in time to see the procession that would bring the Stone up to the castle. George IV Bridge was closed to traffic and the bus was routed down Lothian Road toward the West End of Princes Street. Others on the bus were shaking their heads and exchanging aggravated comments at the inconvenience; already that week, residents on the Royal Mile had issued protests at the fact that their road had been closed for three days in preparation for the festivity. I got off the bus and ran, arriving at the door of the National Library where

I'd arranged to meet a friend ten minutes late. But ultimately, ten minutes didn't make any difference. Although a large crowd had lined the street, extending from the top of the Royal Mile down to near the gates of Holyrood, nothing much appeared to be happening. It was a quiet crowd. People chattered with their companions, a few babies cried, children waved their little Saltires expectantly. There was a brigade of young men dressed up in old style kilts and plaids, their faces painted blue and white; they (or other lads in similar garb) seem to appear whenever there is a big public event in Edinburgh. Some people held SNP banners or home-made ones with nationalist slogans, but there was no chanting or singing or much at all in the way of vocal sentiment.

We all stood there for a long time-- or what felt like a long time in the cold, damp morning. A few soldiers marched up and down the street, their shoes tapping on the cobbles. After a few passes up and down in front of us, they formed two lines, one facing the crowd on each side of the street. They spaced themselves evenly along the street and took up a guarding stance, fixed bayonets over their shoulders and pink ears sticking out below their Glengarry caps.

*"I wonder what they would do if the crowd got violent,"* Christine speculated quietly in my ear. *"Do you think they would use those?"*

Just as people were beginning to grow impatient, the sound of drums could be heard from down the hill. Heads turned and necks craned. People stood on tiptoe to see what was happening. Finally, platoons from a number of army regiments marched by, indistinguishable from each other to myself and most of the crowd but by their banners. Some Royal Navy and RAF troops passed as well, and a couple of



pipe bands. Then it stopped again, and people muttered to each other. *"What's going on?"*

A few minutes later, a solitary man with coat-tails and a briefcase scurried by, his tails flapping behind him. I heard giggles from the crowd. Nobody seemed to know who he was. Finally, a procession of robed and wigged judges and dignitaries came by, followed by a number of black Rolls Royces. One of them carried a waving but otherwise unexcited looking Prince Andrew. A few people in the crowd cheered and others booed. The next car contained Michael Forsyth who was grinning from ear to ear. The booing was louder and far more widespread this time. I wondered if he could hear it through the glass. Then came the specially equipped Land Rover with the stone strapped to a covered platform on the back. It was a smallish, greyish, rectangular, and entirely unassuming chunk of rock.

*"Is that it?"* people were saying.

*"I thought it'd be bigger!"*

*"I missed it. Was that it?"*

There was almost no cheering from the crowd. People were quiet apart from a hushed sort of murmur that went round. I was struck then by a powerful sense of anticlimax. It all seemed a little sad that the reserved citizens of Edinburgh could not rouse themselves for such an event.

*"Aye hen,"* said the old woman standing next to me. *"Its nice tae have the stane back and a' that, but I still dinnae have the money to buy eggs and milk. Stanes dinnae pay the rent."* With that statement, I realised that the crowd *was* reacting. I began to suspect that it wasn't reserve or indifference I was seeing at all,

but frustration and cynicism, even a quiet anger. Talking to people I knew following the event confirmed this suspicion. *"Its a campaign ploy, that's all. That bloody Forsyth thinks he can buy our vote by giving us the Stone back. What, does he think we're all that stupid? Its a poor substitute for a parliament, isn't it."*

I had imagined that a symbol which had been the subject of as much emotionally-heated debate as the Stone of Destiny, and for so long, would have been greeted with enthusiasm *despite* the motive for its return. Perhaps naively, I had until that point attributed a great deal of power to the pageantry surrounding this symbolic gesture. With their silence, the Edinburgh folk lining the street that day were asking the government for something far more substantial than a stone. I thought of the musician's challenge to Michael Forsyth: *"You can keep your Stone. We don't need it anymore because we've got our tunes."*

The next day, Joyce Macmillan wrote in the Scotsman: "Edinburgh stood and watched and thought its thoughts in silence."

There are several reasons, I am sure, for the failure of this highly public gesture to capture the imaginations and affections of the Edinburgh public. The Stone of Destiny may be an important symbol of aspects of Scottish history (the supposed connection of the old kings to the land they ruled; the domination of the English, and certainly more recently the almost farcical misreading of the political situation in Scotland by the Conservative party, among other things), but any emotional significance it may have carried was, for many people, blotted out by the sinking sense that the stone's return was simply a ploy to win votes.

The nature of the event was likely to blame as well. For all intents and purposes, it was a military parade; like Christine and many other of my friends, I could not quite overcome the feeling that it was as much a show of British power (embodied in the figure of Michael Forsyth himself, waving and grinning from the safety and quiet of his car) as it was an altruistic gesture of friendship between one nation and another. Perhaps in another time or another place, this sort of display might have whipped up the frenzy of patriotism Forsyth seemed to hope for, but in a Scotland thoroughly disillusioned with the political status quo and the seemingly iron grip of the Conservative government, it was undoubtedly felt to be anachronistic. *"It was Forsyth's way of telling us we're still colonials,"* was the way my friend Alan characteristically put it.

Fentriss and Wickham (1992) focus less upon the mass public events and more upon the use of oral poetry, song and storytelling as means of transmitting a sense of collective memory. They argue that the actual textual content of what is transmitted, the facts as it were, are less important than the transmission of particular ideas and images. As social or political circumstances change, different ideas and images may be emphasised by tellers or listeners and deemed to be important: the story may not change but the moral might. Daily activities and acts of remembrance, such as the singing of songs or telling of stories (as Inglis (1988; 20) notes, "Stories in the old sense are still made out of the morning news, and storytellers may be found in many people.") act as continual reinforcements of memory and identity. Both Fentriss and Wickham (1992), and Tonkin (1992) highlight the importance of structuring conventions within storytelling, oral poetry and song, which integrate the

particular subject matter of the narrative into a mutually understood framework. For example, many songs in British folk traditions begin with an appeal to the audience: “Come all ye people,” “Come all ye miners” or the like. Generally songs begun in this fashion act as both a narrative of a specific event and a statement of a greater moral or political message; the mode of beginning is the singer/storyteller’s way of rallying the troops, as it were.

I argue that song in particular works to this end because it reinforces its “message” with the emotional impact of music; it reaches us at both a cognitive and an emotional level. Making music or singing with a group of other people can be, as I explored in the last chapter, a powerful socially binding experience. Moreover, songs can draw upon both textual and musical themes or motifs which are socially meaningful and act as symbols of a particular community’s historical or present experience. This is not to say that particular forms of music arise organically from particular groups of people or can only be adequately understood and performed by them (as some people involved in earlier days of the folk revival, such as Ewan MacColl believed). Rather, it is to say that musical genres can become stages for the public exploration of relationships between one community and another or between members of the same community (Erlmann 1996), or where people create or strengthen a sense of belonging to what they perceive to be a community.

The history that is transmitted in song, as in other forms of popular culture, is remembered because it is seen to carry messages or lessons relevant to contemporary life. Injustices of the past become metaphors for the injustices of the present. As Pickering writes, “Songs of tradition thus stand to tell us more about those who sing

and listen to them, in any given present, than they do of the past to which they relate”(1987; 65). Many of my singing friends tell me that they have learned much about Scotland’s history through song and that this has helped, at least partially, to remedy the lack of Scottish history they learned in school (it is still widely believed that Scottish history is still displaced for British or English history in the formal educational curriculum). Likewise, they tell me they feel they can be “more in touch” with the figures brought to life in song than they can with the “Great Men” of the books.

I would posit that the current popularity of Scottish fiction, likewise, owes much to the fact that most of it quite consciously places itself and explores aspects of Scottish past and present experience. The “Braveheart Phenomenon”(the wave of nationalism and blue face-painting that has seemingly been inspired by the film), as well, has occurred *not* because of its accurate portrayal of William Wallace’s life in the thirteenth century but because the film provided a spark of heroic inspiration (the sort Hollywood is so good at igniting, for better or worse) at a time when contemporary political events were less than inspiring. There is a sex-appeal factor here too; shortbread-tin images of an effeminate, kilted Bonnie Prince Charlie might be embarrassing but an unquestionably masculine kilted Mel Gibson is not. Long hair and kilts (with plaids) began to appear at ceilidhs in larger and larger numbers after the film came out.

However, to return to the folk songs. Now I want to turn more specifically to particular aspects of Scottish history which are the subjects of many of the songs sung by people I know. Through the singing of miners’ songs and songs specifically

about the experiences of women, people are simultaneously remembering particular histories and also using them to make a statement about their own present positions and opinions. Although “Scottishness” dominates most of the discussion in this thesis, it must be remembered that class and gender will always inform one’s sense of Scottishness and that these songs explore both Scottish history and class and gender histories that in many respects cross-cut national boundaries.

### **Workin down the dungeon: working class memories**

Come all you colliers who work down the mines  
From Scotland to South Wales, from Teesdale to Tyne.  
I’ll sing you a song of the pound a week’s rise  
And the men who were fooled by the government’s lies.

And its down you go down below Jack,  
Where you’ll never see the skies  
And you’re workin down the dungeon  
For a pound a week’s rise.  
Ed Pickford 1963, “The pound a week’s rise”

For national history to be relevant to individual lives, it must be mediated through personal experience. Socio-economic class forms a complex of experiences through which people construct their ideas about the nation. This section thus deals with the ways in which people use song to form, through social memory, a sense of belonging to a working class history. Most of the folk singers I know claim some kind of family connection to a rural or industrial working class history; indeed, it is often the case that those from privileged backgrounds do their best to cover up the fact. They use song, very often, as a way of exploring that history, of making themselves feel part of it, of making it real for themselves as it were. I have, in a few cases, encountered some debate (generally not between the singers themselves but

between others, often of a socialist persuasion) over whether university educated professionals “should” sing songs about types of work of which they obviously have no personal experience. This debate, to the extent that it exists, in many ways replicates Chapman’s odd division between “real” Celts and “would-be” Celts (1994); this time it is “real working class” and “would-be” working class. It is not, in my mind, a productive division to make because it does not account for the ways in which anybody conceptualises their own activities. They do not deem themselves to be inauthentic.

Throughout much of this century, the Scottish drive toward home rule has been implicated with trade unions and varying degrees of socialist sentiment, and many of the people I know in the folk scene actively label themselves as socialists or even communists. However, at the same time, they in some ways challenge a rigidified Marxist notion of class and class-conflict in that they have been upwardly mobile in their own lifetimes or are children of parents who moved from a working class background into a more middle-class one. These people are not easily slotted into one category or another, and although they no longer have a place in a working-class community (whatever that may be), they do not like to regard themselves as middle class either. The situation in which many of the people I know have, at one point or another, found themselves, is eloquently illustrated by William MacIlvanney in *The kiln*:

‘I suppose you’re something of a curio to them,’ John Benchley says. Not just to them. He’s something of a curio to himself, he thinks, as he goes on responding mechanically to John’s remarks. Taking the night-shift job in the brickwork for the summer has produced another split in his sense of himself. He feels he is subdividing into such a crowd of multiple personalities he’ll never be able to unify them into any kind of order. He can



imagine how Cran and the others would react if they knew he tried to write poetry. Ritual stoning with reject bricks. But at the same time as he doesn't really fit in there, he cannot honestly believe that his acceptance for university is real and that he will be starting there at the end of the summer. This is not what anyone in his family has ever done. A part of him is waiting for the inevitable day when an official-looking envelope will land on the doormat addressed to him. He knows roughly what its contents will be.

(Dear Mr. Docherty,

We regret to inform you that there has, of course, been a mistake in the matter of your being given a place at this university. We trust that this error has not inconvenienced you too much by, for example, giving you absurd fantasies concerning the possibility that learned men will waste their time on a working-class toerag from Graithnock. We do, however, hope that you will find in future some activity more suited to your abilities, such as shovelling shit.

Yours faithfully,

An Amazingly Clever Man).(MacIlvanney 1996; 92-3)

Again, we see the theme of the split personality, previously mentioned in discussions of language use and the conflict between emotional nationalism and economic or political unionism. Certainly, that identity should come to be questioned with socio-economic mobility is neither new nor particularly Scottish. Hoggart (1957), for example, described upwardly mobile English working class people as “uprooted” and portrayed their situations as similar to those of MacIlvanney’s protagonist. Yet, some literature and many folk songs emphasise that class identity and conflict are central aspects of Scottishness. A sense of belonging within a community based around a single industry (i.e. mining, shipbuilding or fishing) is portrayed, in literature such as this and in song to be both fundamental within Scottish<sup>2</sup> identity generally, but also to be either dead or dying.

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<sup>2</sup> More accurately, Lowland Scottish identity. Discourses of class and industrial decline are less central in Highland cultural expression, where the dominant themes tend to be about land and language. Of course class is implicated in the ongoing struggles over land rights/ownership in the Highlands, but the debates tend not to be framed primarily around the concept of class.

In her account of the experiences of miners' wives during the miners' strike of 1984-1985, journalist Jean Stead quotes the words of one Scottish woman: "They're the real men, the strikers. They are the best workers, the face workers--the real workers, the brave ones" (quoted by Stead 1987; 75). Songs dealing with the experience of miners, and coal miners in particular, are central to the Scottish folksong tradition, as they are in parts of northern England (where the song above was written) and Wales; they may be seen to fall into the category of "industrial" or "occupational" songs more generally, "...in which descriptions of work conditions, or attitudes towards work form a significant textual element"(Cohen 1993; 332). These songs and the discourses surrounding them bring to the surface a number of themes which exemplify ways in which people construct notions of a working class history and a sense of belonging to it. Other industries, such as fishing, have produced a substantial body of song which illustrates similar themes, but mining songs are both particularly numerous and particularly popular among many of the singers (both male and female) I know in Edinburgh. Through the singing of these songs and the conversations that follow, people verbalise their feelings about aspects of Scotland's industrial and post-industrial history and at the same time reflect upon this history's legacy in the present. Additionally, although mining has long been in decline in Scotland, as in Britain more generally, and although it has by no means been the only or most important industry, there is a substantial body of public discourse which holds miners and their plight as symbolic representatives of the industrial working class more generally.

The history remembered in the songs and the singing of them is connected to a class history which, in large part transcends national boundaries. Wight (1993; 3) notes in his ethnography of a former mining community in the Central Belt that common experience as an “industrial proletariat” has been far more important, socially and culturally, for the people of whom he writes than has nationality. However, while I would agree that class certainly cross-cuts nationality and nationalism in many respects, it also informs them. In his history of the Scottish Trades Union Council, Aitken (1997) refers constantly to the interlinked nature of Scottish industrial life, devolutionary or nationalist politics, and much of what is perceived to characterise Lowland Scottish culture in general.

I do not see people’s formulations of class as separable from their formulations of Scottish national culture; time and time again people asserted to me that there was a collectivist, or even naturally socialist, element to Scottish culture that was absent south of the Border. As I have stated elsewhere, Scottish nationalism throughout this century has been intricately connected with socialism, trades unionism, and subsequently the economic upheavals caused by de-industrialisation. Furthermore, some observers point to a “Scottish myth” (MacLaren 1989) of equality, not necessarily of economic circumstance but of economic and educational potential or opportunity. This theme tends to centre round a rural or urban working class man “made good”, as it were, often labelled “the lad o’ pairts.” It is an image which has manifested itself notably in twentieth century Scottish literature (as in the writings of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Neil Gunn, and later authors like William

MacIlvanney), and which centres upon the idea that Scottish egalitarianism must be seen as relative to a more rigidly hierarchical mentality in England.

Frequently, I have encountered the idea that a Scottish central government would distance itself from the headlong rush toward the free market and privatisation, and would invest more in social services. Often, furthermore this idea is framed obviously in terms of “wishful thinking”, as though people recognise at an intellectual level that this may or may not be true. For example, two months before the general election, I was sitting in the pub with some musicians I know. Scott was discussing a rally we had all attended, protesting cutbacks to local government funding. He was on a characteristic cynical rant about the ills of modern society and particularly the lack of funding for education, health care and housing. At one point, he leaned back in his chair and said,

*“Of course, in an independent Scotland, this wouldn’t happen.”*

Surprised, I asked him whether he really believed that. He sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

*“I try to,”* he said.

Much of the SNP’s strategy has been to promote an independent Scotland as an economically stable, socially responsible and aware, tolerant, and liberal nation. It draws upon the same conceptualisation of an egalitarian and caring community-based society that many of my friends have expressed both through song and conversation; most of them tell me they do not *actually* believe Scotland would be any more egalitarian than anywhere else, but this myth remains part of their imagining of it nevertheless. James Scott (1990) notes that nearly all cultural

traditions carry some kind of utopian vision of “the world turned upside down”, in which hierarchies of political and economic power are levelled or reversed. He writes: “Most traditional utopian beliefs can, in fact, be understood as a more or less systematic negation of an existing pattern of exploitation and status degradation as it is experienced by subordinate groups”(1990; 81). Likewise, deCerteau writes that these kind of beliefs and tales can protect “the weapons of the weak against the reality of an established order” and thus prevent that order from becoming entirely hegemonic (1984; 23). That Scotland, more than other industrialised regions of the UK, is exploited or degraded by its current position in the Union is debatable, but many people believe it to have been particularly affected, because such a large percentage of its population has worked in industry rather than in white-collar sectors, by recent Conservative-led de-industrialisation. Aitken (1997; 226) points out that between 1979 and 1981, the Scottish manufacturing sector lost eleven percent of its output and twenty percent of its jobs. De-industrialisation led to high unemployment in the 1980s, but it has also led to increased fluidity between classes. According to McCrone:

...Scotland’s middle classes have not only grown in size but have become much more varied in their social origins, and hence life-styles, social values and even political attitudes. Far less than before are we able to read off the politics of class interests from occupational positions (1992; 141).

Coal mining has a long history in the Scottish Lowlands, as it does in many parts of England and Wales; although there are still a handful of working mines scattered throughout Britain, this history is deemed by many people to be ‘finished’. Monktonhall, the last functioning deep mine in Midlothian, closed in 1997 after a prolonged fight against both financial and structural decay. The 1984-85 strike and

subsequent closure of many mines is often held up as a watershed, the end not only of an industry but of an entire system of social relationships. It is thought to have been the death toll for hundreds of communities. Paul Gilfillan (1997) explored how former miners in a Fife village construct social memory of the miners' strike and summarised his dissertation with a statement made by one of his interviewees: "When they close a pit, they kill a community."

The singing of miners' songs and the representations of miners and their lives has been a subject on which I have encountered a substantial amount of discussion in the Edinburgh singing community. Fundamentally, many singers tend to portray colliers as the quintessential working class heroes of pre-Thatcherite Scotland, perhaps because mining is often perceived to be more dangerous and more exploitative of the workers than other industries. Many of the songs portray miners as harder workers than those in other industries, and also as more politically and socially committed men; this portrayal is exemplified in the title of Lloyd's collection of miners' songs, *Come all ye bold miners* (1978), and by Dick Gaughan's record of mining songs: *The true and bold: songs of the Scottish miners*.

The strike and the closure of the pits is represented as the ultimate betrayal of the working class, the downfall of Scottish industry, and the destruction of a way of life. Najam (1990) notes that there has long been a close inter-relationship between mining and working-class political radicalism in Scotland, and that although the industry and the radicalism have both declined, the symbolic associations still exist. She cites a former Fife miner, who said to her: "The miners have *ayeways*,

historically speaking...led, they have been the advance guard o' the British working class in all their struggles"(1990; 151).

The songs themselves are often ones that have been written by miners, or members of mining communities, often in response to particular historical episodes. However, as Lloyd notes in the introduction to his collection (1978; 20), they continue to be sung and deemed relevant because their reference to specific events is framed within a context of ongoing social significance: specific strikes represent all strikes and specific tragedies represent all industrial tragedies.

Mining and mining communities are remembered through these songs with a mixture of nostalgia and grim realism. I have gained a strong sense that many people are expressing a sense of loss for the close-knit communities and collective ethics they perceive to have been central to mining. One young man I know grew up partially in a former mining community in the west of Scotland. He likes to recall the ways the families of the community would pool their resources and their labour to help each other through "hard times". His family, having moved to Edinburgh, has separated itself from both the community and the financial hardships it experienced there. In many ways, however, he tells me he feels the family has lost much of its strength and unity in this separation. *"See, in those days, all the men worked together in the pit and all the women helped each other in the hooses,"* he said to me. *"Everyone was in the same boat, more or less. It was hard, I suppose, but it wasnae lonely. Not in the way middle class life can be lonely. You knew all your neighbours, and you knew where you stood wi' em. That bitch Thatcher ended it all, though. Our family got through it alright but I ken some men who havenae worked*



*since the strike.*” He frequently sings this song, which is well known in the folk scene and sung by many people in many versions:

*The Collier Laddie*

I hae traivelled east and I’ve traivelled west  
And I hae been to Kircaldy.  
But the bonniest lassie that e’er I’ve seen  
Was followin a collier laddie.

Oh where dae ye bide, my pretty fair maid  
And tell me whit dae they call ye.  
Bonnie Jean Gordon is my name,  
And I’m followin my collier laddie.

Oh can ye see yon high high hills  
The sun shines on sae brawly,  
Well they’re a’ mine and shall be thine,  
Gin ye leave yer collier laddie.

And ye shall gang in gay attire  
Weel buskit up sae brawly  
Wi’ yin tae wait on either hand  
Gin ye leave yer collier laddie.

Oh I winna hae yer lands  
And I winna hae yer rents,  
Ye’ll never mak’ me a lady.  
For I’d rather gang wi’ yin that’s black,  
Than wi’ you and a’ yer money.

For love, oh love is the bargain for me,  
Though wee cot hoose should haud me  
I’ll mak’ my bed in a collier’s neuk  
And lay doon wi’ my collier laddie.<sup>3</sup>

The centrality of the family (with the hard working man and the selfless woman at its core), and of work are themes commonly brought out in the songs. People perhaps reach into memories of this working class past for a sense of

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<sup>3</sup> This version of the song is taken from the singing of the band “Chantan” (Christine Kydd, Elspeth Cowie and Corrina Hewat). The one printed by Lloyd (1976) was collected by Hamish Henderson in 1951 and contains several more verses. Lloyd notes that a version of the song was collected written

belonging--to a community and to an industry--and find there something that can fill a gap in a fragmentary present life characterised by mobility and instability in relationships and employment. Speaking of a neighbourhood in Valetta (the Maltese capital) that was largely torn down in the 1960's, Mitchell observes that "...memories produce an image of the past that creates unity in the face of adversity" (1998; 83). Furthermore, he notes that these memories of "a demolished community" are used to present an image of *contemporary* identity and solidarity (*ibid.*). Likewise, writing of the processes of identity-formulation in the "post-industrial city", Wallman argues that an individual identity based upon socio-economic position is becoming less relevant to contemporary life and that people now have to search out their own senses of social identity: "Existentially, as well as physically, identity is becoming something which has to be achieved--found--in appropriate kinds of places and activities"(1993; 60).

Many of the folk singers I know would now be classed officially as part of an urban middle class. A large percentage of them have degrees and work in non-manual, service oriented jobs such as teaching or community and social work. However, they claim an affiliation with mining songs, or those of other industries, through the experiences of their parents or grandparents. They are not necessarily people whose families have long been middle-class; they are often the first generation of their families to have received a high level of formal education and to have worked in a non-manual job. Although they do not necessarily *deny* that they are now middle class (in an economic sense though they might deny having what

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down (likely collected rather than composed) by Burns and thus has been sung in one form or another since at least as far back as the late eighteenth century.

they would call middle class values), they do not like to be slotted into that category (this coincides to a large degree with Mackinnon's (1993) statements). I would not say that this is a case of naive glorification of mining or other working class life, but rather that people find an amount of pride in claiming familial membership with a type of community they admire.

Furthermore, the working class community they claim membership to is one deemed to be, in most cases long gone; in fact it likely owes much of its sheer existence to people's memories of it. In a sense they can be seen to be re-defining class categories by claiming class membership based upon values and social memory rather than immediate educational and economic circumstances. Connections with a working class past are maintained through the telling of stories and the singing of songs and, in Najam's terms, the past is used as a source of "political education" (1990; 150). As Lowland Scots, these singers also view themselves to be the inheritors of a cultural tradition in which left-wing political activism has a central symbolic place. Even those people who have moved out of working class circumstances themselves have told me they feel it as their duty to remember the conditions their parents and grandparents coped with.

For many of the people I know, this political education includes a sense of duty toward political activism. An SNP member I know once told me that "*The problem wi' musicians is that they dinnae do anything. They may call themselves nationalists or socialists or whatever, but they arenae active enough.*" My reply to him was, and still is, that it depends upon how one defines activism. As folk singers, people recognise themselves to be the inheritors of an artistic legacy that has long

been profoundly engaged with (largely left wing) political activism in this country, in Ireland and in North America (as my grandparents, who welcomed many a black-listed folk singer into their house during the McCarthy years, knew well). Gramsci viewed the understanding of folk lore and folk culture as essential to the breaking down of the barrier between the elite and the popular (in Forgacs, ed. 1988; 360); for him, the practice of folk culture was an inherently political activity (even though he regarded much of its content as irrational and superstitious).

Most of the people with whom I have spent a large amount of time have vivid memories of the miners' strike; some of them were actively involved in it, joining in the protests and writing songs. Their memories of the year of 1984-85 are profoundly mixed. Some people recall it as an inspiring time, even though the strike ended in defeat, largely, for the miners. What people most frequently told me was that the strike was the last widespread mass social movement in Britain (barring perhaps the anti poll tax demonstrations in 1990) and that the defeat of the strike ultimately bespoke the downfall of serious political activism. Others remember more grimly the economic hardships and the break-up of families, and they warn against the dangers of seeing the past through rose-tinted lenses. They tell me the "solidarity" of which many people speak has been created in memory, and tell of men who were condemned by their peers for returning to work through sheer desperation and poverty.

I have met people who are somewhat uncomfortable with the singing of miners' songs for a number of reasons. Sometimes, people whose families have been involved in other industries have objected to the portrayal of miners as the

“quintessential” workers. One friend, who comes from former mining community but not from a mining family, frequently reminds me that *“Other trades are just as hard and the conditions are just as bloody rotten, ken? Look at my faither, workin in a half shut-doon wire mill. He used tae train guys and now he’s wasted and gets a shite wage and has hardly any pension comin’ tae him. He’ll no get another job now, at his age. Naebody sings songs about him. Maybe I should write one.”*

Others, although they disagree with Thatcher’s methods, believe that de-industrialisation and the closure of the pits was in many ways inevitable. Although they may sympathise with the plight of the miners, they wonder whether it is productive to dwell on the death of the industry. Their “causes” change.

*“Economies ayeways change, for better or worse”* says one friend. *“We can sit here singin socialist songs and callin’ for the revolution and a’ that, but I sometimes think that its a bit oot o’ date now. When it comes doon tae it, I’m more worried about global warmin’ these days. Christ, it wasnae if coal mining was great for the environment or anyone’s health, was it.”*

A recent session at The Royal Oak exemplifies this sort of debate. It was relatively early (by The Oak’s standards) on a Saturday evening. A number of the usual crowd of singers was gathered upstairs, as were some of the more regular drinkers. Included in the numbers that night were a well known Edinburgh based singer/songwriter and an English actor who formerly appeared on Coronation Street and was doing a play in Edinburgh. My friend took the guitar and played Christy Moore’s song “Viva le quince brigada” about the Spanish civil war. When he finished, the singer/songwriter said she was pleased to hear a political song and sang

one of her own, about the miners' strike. At the end of the song, she dedicated it to the memory of Mick McGahey, the former leader of the NUM who died earlier this year. From the other side of the bar, somebody shouted "*He was a bloody commie!*" To which the singer called in response, "*You worried about reds under the bed? Well, I'll tell you something, we're not under the bed. We're on the bed! In fact, we own the bed!*" There was a chorus of cheering and the one protester kept his mouth shut. A number of mining songs followed after that, with full choruses. The actor stood up, and in a deep Lancashire voice, belted out "The Blantyre Explosion", about a Scottish colliery disaster. Certainly, nobody believed The Revolution was going to spill out of the pub onto the streets of Edinburgh, but people at this session took an obvious enjoyment in expressing sentiments that are popularly thought to have been left by the wayside. Rabble-rousing socialist anthems usually inspire a loud chorus in sessions; the songs allow people an outlet to voice sentiments not only for which there are few remaining outlets but which have become less and less acceptable in other forms of expression.

Ultimately, I believe people who sing miners' songs do so not necessarily because they want to sing specifically about miners but because the songs convey much more generally poignant messages about industrial hardships and resistance. The more "contemporary" issues that make the news, global warming for example, have yet to generate a comparable body of song, perhaps because they seem to be so disconnected from any specific locale or historical tradition and cannot be blamed upon any easily identifiable source or scapegoat (such as Margaret Thatcher).

## **Women's songs and women's history**

Just as class-based social memory mediates national identity, so too does gender and a gendered reading of Scottish history. For many of the women singers I know, song becomes a way in which to render women visible in Scottish history, despite the fact that they have largely been omitted in academic historical writing.

Scottish society has often been characterised as 'exceptionally male dominated'. Whilst we would not dissent from this characterisation, it is not unproblematic, in that it seems to give rise too easily to the assumption that women were silenced, suppressed and passive. But the lack of visibility of women in Scottish history up till now is not a result of their absence from political, social or public life. It is a result of the blindness of historians to the significance of women's experience, not to say on occasion to the fact of women's existence (Breitenbach & Gordon 1992; 2).

Studies of Scottish "national culture", and those which involve themselves in deconstructing the Romantic baggage attached to it, (Nairn 1977, Trevor-Roper 1983, Pittock 1991) have focused their attention so entirely upon tartanry, Bonnie Prince Charlie, and Sir Walter Scott that, reading them, it seems sometimes that there *is* no other way of imagining, constructing, or experiencing Scotland. In fact, the only Scotswomen who enter substantially into most historical writings about Scotland are purported witches, Flora MacDonald, and Mary Queen of Scots (Breitenbach 1997; 83). Likewise, the common "Wha's like us" habit of toting up the accomplishments of Scottish inventors, writers, and scientists, is also entirely a listing of men.

The absence of strong feminine imagery in Scottish nationalist rhetoric is also notable. While nationalist movements in many parts of the world employ images of the woman as the reproducer/carrier of the nation (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989), this has not happened substantially in Scotland (Breitenbach 1997; 91). Several



years ago, a Scottish man said to me that he believed Scottish men to be Scottish and Scottish women to be women; it was a categorisation which recalled an old fashioned feminist agenda which saw “womanhood” to transcend other sorts of regional or ethnic boundaries. Breitenbach (*ibid*; 87) argues that the omission of women from writings about and images of Scottishness should inspire caution in the search for a ‘national identity.’ Certainly she is right, although we should not thus assume that womanhood and Scottishness are incompatible aspects of identity. Many of the female singers I know use folk and traditional song in order to explore women’s experiences *as Scots*, in history and in present times.

Many studies of Western nationalisms focus largely upon Romantic nationalism and the male-dominated cultural performances of it: sporting matches, military displays, governmental rhetoric, and violence (of course, it is somewhat ironic that the dominant “hate figure” in recent British politics is a woman, though one who is very often described as having sacrificed her femininity). When, as Fox (1993) points out, gender does enter these discussions, it is usually in the context of the ways in which women were (or are) symbolically linked with nature and land while men are associated with all that is cultural. Feminist anthropology, also, spent its early years documenting this symbolic woman: nature/ man: culture divide in one society after another. Schlegel (1990; 24) argues that this focus likely owed much to the fact that meanings were extracted from mythology, literature and symbolic codes, whereas later more practice-based studies began to break down this dichotomy.

Singers often describe folk and traditional songs as carriers of aspects of national history. Many of the women I know in the folksinging community tell me

that they believe the written history of Scotland is a history of *Scotsmen*: men's wars, men's work, men's struggles. However, they place themselves in both gender and national categories equally; they are women and thus assume they share a body of knowledge and experience with women elsewhere. At the same time, they firmly locate themselves as Scottish women and thus as inheritors of a particular localised history. As Hendry writes, "The female expression of a national character is vital, indeed..."(1992; 136). Through their singing, they see themselves to be learning and thus in a sense experiencing, this history.

There is not a definable body of "women's songs" in the Scots song tradition<sup>4</sup>; as I have stated already, it is acceptable for women to sing songs in the male voice and vice versa. Furthermore, many ballads speak from the perspective of a narrator who may be either male or female, or are structured as dialogues between two or more characters of both sexes. Many insightful and poignant songs about women, and in the female voice, have been written by men, including that notorious philanderer Robert Burns. For example, the group of women with whom I have been singing regularly performs Burns' song "Rantin dog", which he wrote in the voice of a woman who was carrying his illegitimate child. The young woman asks who will help her bear and raise the child, and answers each of her own questions with "the rantin dog" (a ranter was a poet/musician): the daddie of it.

Wha my babie clouts will buy?  
Wha will tent me when I cry?  
Wha will kiss me where I lie?  
The rantin dog, the daddie o't.

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<sup>4</sup> There is not the scope to discuss Gaelic song here. Gaelic waulking songs were sung by women while they worked wool to make tweed and these tend to be regarded as women's work songs. There is no real equivalent in Lowland Scots singing traditions.

Wha will own he did the fau't?  
Wha will buy the groanin' maut?  
Wha will tell me how to ca't?  
The rantin dog, the daddie o't.

When I mount the creepie chair,  
Wha will sit beside me there?  
Gie me Rob, I'll seek nae mair,  
The rantin dog, the daddie o't.

Wha will crack to me my lane?  
Wha will mak' me fidgin' fain?  
Wha will kiss me o'er again?—  
The rantin dog, the daddie o't.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, the theme of this song is relevant to women past and present, and can strengthen a sense of continuity between the experiences of single mothers at the end of the eighteenth century and those at the end of the twentieth. Although some singers will sing songs simply because they like the sound, most will sing those in which they find some personal or social relevance; in many ways, gender influences the uses to which songs are put. As Shuman writes, "Genre classifications and the different uses of particular genres by men and women are significant parts of and indicators for how people construct social worlds and are constructed by them" (1993; 75). The "meaning" or symbolism of a song is not fixed but interpreted by the particular singer and thus communicated to the audience.

Many contemporary folk songs give accounts of women's lives within particular regional industries, such as the north-east fisheries or the Dundee jute mills, and detail the daily activities within these industries. They are not always overtly political in the way many mining and other industrial songs often are. Yet,

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<sup>5</sup> Babie clouts: baby clothes; the groanin' maut: the ale to celebrate the birth; the creepie chair: the chair in which sinners were made to publicly announce themselves in kirk; crack to me my lane; talk to me when I'm alone; mak' me fidgin' fain: make me excited.

like the miners' songs, they portray women not as victims but as strong workers who take a certain amount of pride in their work and their abilities to endure poverty. Singers use the songs to remind themselves and their audiences that women were active as workers, and not just as workers' wives; in this sense, the songs are used in order to challenge a male dominated and male centred historiography of industrial Scotland. Sheena Wellington's "The Wimmin o' Dundee" provides an example of this sort of song:

Oh the men they werena lazy but the work was hard tae find  
The parish and the means test they'd tae face  
But a lassie's hands are nimble and a lassie's wages small  
So the wimmin o' Dundee worked in their place.

Chorus: Oh the wailin o' the bummer and the clackin o' the looms  
Brought the women o' Dundee oot o' their beds  
And they walked tae mills and factories and they worked fae se'en tae five  
And the wimmin kept the bairns o' Dundee fed...

As Hendry (1992) points out, women were present and occupied an important role in many Scottish industries, including weaving, fish processing, and perhaps most notably, jute milling in Dundee, but their activities seldom receive more than a brief mention in even the most contemporary historical accounts.

Traditional songs are frequently more ambiguous in their messages than contemporary ones. As I have stated, these are frequently "narrated" by an unidentified third party or are structured as dialogues. Traditional songs can quite frequently be linked to specific events, although through the oral tradition the song can diverge substantially from the event itself. Over time, the particularity of the event becomes less important than the general type of story; the story told by the ballad can be seen to be a metaphorical representation of many individual tales.

Women are central to the Scottish ballad tradition, as both characters and as singers. Again, the women of these songs tend not to be well known historical characters but rather ordinary women or minor nobles: daughters or serving maids. Many of the “muckle sangs”, the big ballads such as those collected by Child, are classed as love stories, or stories of unrequited love; however, many singers will identify other meanings in them. A common theme in traditional song is that of the wealthy man’s daughter who falls in love with a poor or otherwise unsuitable man. Premarital pregnancy, again, appears as another common thread, and frequently brings consequences such as infanticide, unhappy marriage, or suicide (Symonds 1995). Although these grim endings may reflect the reality of women’s lives in, say, the eighteenth century (*ibid.*); the ballads retain a powerful ambiguity. One never really knows who is in the wrong and who has been wronged.

In most cases, these stories end in tragedy for one or both of the lovers, although there are a few examples of stories in which everyone “lives happily ever after” (at one weekly session, many of the singers fell into the practice of jokingly adding up the “body counts” in the various songs). Some people have told me the ballads are “morality tales”, designed as warnings of what could happen to women who defy the demands of their social stations. Seen in a different light, they are used as examples of resistance by women who would follow their hearts despite strict social codes and possible consequences, or of women breaking free of the oppressive rule of their fathers or husbands.

An example is the ballad “The Floo’er (or flower) of Northumberland”, in which a young Northumbrian woman runs away with a Scotsman who is held

prisoner by her father. Like all ballads, it is sung in many versions, but the short(ish) one I know is this:

A provost's daughter was walkin her lane [alone]  
Oh but her love it was easy won  
When she spied a Scots prisoner makin' his moan  
And she was the floo'er of Northumberland.

He said Oh gin [if] the lassie would marry me  
And oh but her love it was easy won  
I would mak' her a lady of high degree  
If she'd loosen me oot of my prison sae strang.

So she's gang tae [gone to] her faither's good stocks  
Oh but her love it was easy won  
And she's stolen the key for those many brave locks  
To loosen him oot of his prison sae strang.

Then she's gang tae her faither's stable  
Oh but her love it was easy won  
And she's stolen a horse that was baith fleet and able  
To carry them baith to fair Scotland.

But as they rode over the bonnie Scots moor,  
He said Oh but your love it was easy won,  
Get you doon of my horse, you're a brazen-faced hoor [whore]  
Even though you're the floo'er of Northumberland.

Oh its cook in your kitchen I surely must be,  
Oh for my love it was easy won  
For I cannot go back to my own country  
Even though I'm the floo'er of Northumberland.

Its cook in my kitchen you never shall be,  
Oh though your love it was easy won  
For my lady she willna have servants like thee  
So you'll need to go back to Northumberland.

And when she got hame her faither did frown  
He said Oh but your love it was easy won  
To go with a Scotsman when you're barely sixteen,  
And you were the floo'er of Northumberland.

But when she got hame her mother did smile,  
She said Oh but your love it was easy won,

You're not the first that yon Scots did beguile,  
And you're welcome back hame [home] to Northumberland.

And you will not want meat, you will not want wine  
Oh though your love it was easy won  
And you will not want silver to buy you a man  
And you're still the fair floo'er of Northumberland.<sup>6</sup>

It is possible to interpret this song as the morality story, as some do, and argue that the girl got what was coming to her. I have known some singers to omit the final verse, in which the mother insists that the girl's desirability is not diminished by her actions (whether or not she has escaped with her maidenhood intact). On the other hand, several of the women I know who sing this place the emphasis on the mother's forgiveness and admission that perhaps she herself had been "beguiled" by a Scotsman; the mother-daughter bond can thus be portrayed as equally central to the story as the girl's behaviour or the Scotsman's deception. Emphasising particular lines or verses over others can imbue the song with different meanings and present the audience with a slightly different message.

In conversation with female singers, those in my group and others, I have repeatedly heard people talk about the lives of "ordinary women". In general, people tend to emphasise that the history they deem to be of importance is not to do with momentous episodes in Scottish history but rather with ongoing daily struggles of Scotsmen and women. It is a fact that Scottish women are not well documented in historical writing, but aspects of their lives and notions about their positions in society are carried in the immense body of traditional song. It is not a heroic national history punctuated by military campaigns that the singers, and particularly the

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<sup>6</sup> I have transcribed this song as it is sung by my friend Anne, and the combination of English and Scots words and pronunciations is hers.



women, portray but rather one through which everyday hardships mark a continuous thread.

The songs themselves are used to tell (hi)stories, but the performances, and the contexts in which they take place, often themselves enter into a body of social memory for the singers. Many of the women in the group talk about the role of women in the transmission of the oral tradition, and the contexts through which they have learned songs or sung them. As Munro (1996; see also Symonds 1985) points out, it is often thought that women have long been equally or more important than men in the transmission and continuation of Scottish song and storytelling. In a “traditional” context, their performances would have taken place in the house, while working or entertaining. Many of the “sources” of the ballads collected by folklorists, from Child at the turn of the century to David Buchan and Hamish Henderson in the mid-century, were women who largely did sing only for their own family and friends. They also sang to children. Although these later collectors acknowledge that individuals “actively participated” (Henderson 1980; 74) in the songs they sung, very little attention has been paid to how their gender has shaped their relationships with the music or how the social memory generated through the songs has shaped their own identities as Scottish women. It is possible to suggest that singing offered women an outlet for the expression of sentiments that were not acceptable outside the house or in the company of men. As Abu-Lughod suggests (1986), speaking of women’s oral poetry in a Bedouin society, the performance of these songs allow people the freedom to experience that which may be deemed

outwith the limits of “official” cultural expression. In different contexts, one performs different sides or aspects of oneself.

Singers I know, likewise, speak of the domestic sphere as an important site of performance and source of songs. We have all spoken often about learning songs from parents or grandparents, or from other women, and I have gained a sense that most of them like to prioritise the familial and social aspects of this tradition. Folk singers (of both genders) will generally prioritise the private performances (i.e. in the kitchen or living-room, among friends) as equally legitimate to the public ones in pubs and folk clubs. However, the transition from singing in a private sphere to singing in a public one still seems to happen less easily for many women than it does for men, often for the reasons I have highlighted in the previous chapter.

The incorporation of a notion that singing in the house is more traditional seems to me a way for many women singers (apart from the very few who make it) to claim a type of validity for their performances. Out of many conversations and private sessions, I have taken away a sense that many of the participants feel this type of performance to be just as (or even more) “real” somehow than that which occurs in pubs. It might be noted here that the Gaelic word *ceilidh*, which now tends to refer to a formally organised Scottish dance, originally referred to precisely what these women are doing: coming together in somebody’s home to share songs, stories, and company. In an objective sense, of course, neither type of performance should be classed as more authentic than the other (see Posen 1993), but this type of legitimisation of the one over the other can be seen as a pragmatic response to the conditions the folk scene has set, particularly for women singers. By harking back to

social memory, to “the way things used to be done”, these women are transforming their marginal position in the folk scene into a central one.

From the discussions of this chapter, we see that history is not confined to the past but something we carry with us in our daily activities. For folk singers, it informs both the material they perform and the ways in which they interpret the contexts in which they perform. The ways in which we conceptualise both class and gender are not rigid but rather shaped by social experience and by our readings of our own histories and those of the people with whom we associate ourselves.

Reconnecting this discussion with a broader discussion of nationalism, I argue that it is only through a highly subjective “experiencing” of national history and national culture, and the individual tailoring of the social categories within the nation, such as class and gender, that individuals perceive the nation to be meaningful.

## **VIII: Musical maps: performance and the localising of identity**

Even now I hear the yellow valve radio of my childhood warning of snow and ice on the Devil's Elbow and Rest and Be Thankful. In the stillness of this room I glimpse so many roads, and hear the litany of names like an article of faith: the Hills of Kishorn, the Electric Brae, Kylescu Ferry, the Summer Isles, Inchnadamph, Romanno Bridge, the Howe of Fife...Some places, like some people, you love before you've ever met.

---Andrew Greig, 1992; *The electric brae*

It has always seemed extraordinary to me how the name of the island, Colonsay, seems to hang suspended in the minds not only of my immediate relatives but also of collateral clansmen in scattered parts of the United States and Canada...Just the name of the island seems to set off in virtually all of these people, who now live anywhere between the oceans, some sort of atavistic vibration, and all they really have in common is the panoptic glaze that will appear in their eyes at the mention of the word Colonsay.

---John McPhee, 1992; *The crofter and the laird*

These two passages, the first by a Scottish writer and the second by an American, illustrate the suggestivity of places, or at least place-names, for people in a mobile and ever transitional world. As the previous chapter examined the ways in which people use music to locate themselves in relation to particular histories, this one will tackle the ways they use it to locate themselves in relation to places (although, of course, history and place should not be seen as entirely distinct from each other. The fact that most of the people of whom I speak here are or have been at some points in their lives mobile has many implications for this discussion. In much of the contemporary world, connection to place is cultivated as much in memory or daydream as it is through actual physical existence there. Scottish music, both song and instrumental, is laden with references to place-names, to localised memories and histories, and to the act of *leaving* places. Performing this music often functions as a

way of establishing reference points upon a map of the country, and of staking some kind to knowledge about those points.

This chapter will explore, first, some issues relating to the connections between place and people and the ways in which we conceptualise “home”. I will first outline current theoretical positions on this issue and will then connect them with the contemporary Scottish socio-political climate. I will then move on to look at two main themes arising out of the musical references to place. First, I argue that the movement of people, within Scotland and across Scotland’s borders, has had a profoundly influential effect upon the contemporary cultural revival, and particularly upon the folk revival. Internal migration, emigration and immigration are historical facts which generate a tremendous amount of contemporary social memory and folk culture. These various types of population movement also inspire debates about who has the *rights* to live where and claim belonging to land. I will recount a musical event which occurred at the centre of this debate, in the context of the community buy-out of the Isle of Eigg.

Secondly, I will explore ways in which landscape inspires music. Here, landscape does not simply imply natural features but rather a fusion of natural and human histories. Landscape and wilderness have long occupied a central position in representations of Scotland and Scottishness. I will examine some of the ways these memories and readings of landscape are expressed through music, and the ways in which people use music in order to explore and politicise relationships with and uses of landscape.

## **Where the heart is or where the hat hangs: defining home**

The definition and use of the concept of culture, and subsequently the connection between culture and place, has been perhaps the most fundamental subject of debate in recent anthropology. As “professional outsiders”, we now see it as our duty to question the assumption that people belong to places (and that places belong to people), that our identities and senses of who we are must be formed by our long and secure roots in the soil of home. This was the assumption behind Romantic nationalism, for example, as it is behind those more contemporary struggles in places not so far from us. Although many self-deprecating anthropological writers subsequently blamed their disciplinary ancestors for the perpetuation of this association between “peoples” or “cultures” with bounded (or at least boundable) territories (see Fabian 1983, Clifford 1988, Handler 1988), it is probably more accurate to say that anthropology in the past simply failed to break away from what was an accepted popular formulation.

It no longer seems logical to root people and culture to soil. How to get away from doing so, however, can still be difficult, particularly when people themselves seem to like to *represent* themselves as rooted. The growing body of literature on globalisation (see, for example, Miller 1987, 1995b) and transnationalism (i.e. Hannerz 1996) begins to examine the ways in which cultural forms and products travel and are incorporated by “local” people into “local” culture and use. Hannerz (*ibid.*) suggests that “local” and “global” should be seen as two ends of a spectrum. He employs the word transnationalism to refer to “...phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distribution, even when they do share the characteristic of

not being contained within a state.” (*ibid*; 6). These phenomena can be products of multinational corporations or forms created and consumed at a much smaller level. Celtic music is undeniably a transnational phenomenon, in that although much of it is produced by, for example, Irish or Scottish performers, it is consumed by audiences across the world. At the same time, this fact does not undermine the connection people believe the music maintains with Scotland or Ireland.

However, this sort of phenomenon should not be portrayed as the product only of very recent times. As I shall discuss with reference to Scottish migration later, the so-called “new” phenomenon of mass migration, “transnational” migration as many anthropologists now like to call it, is by no means new. Mintz (1998) eloquently criticises current theories of transnationalism by examining the lengthy patterns of multi-cultural settlement in the Caribbean. His point is simply this: “The new theories of transnationalism and globalisation are not respectful enough of history, especially of the history of exploration, conquest and the global division of labour”(1998; 131).

Some studies of migration and of minority or immigrant populations have now begun to exemplify the multi-faceted and shifting nature of localised identity (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992). These studies have begun to ask some monumental questions. Do people leave their homes and remain, forevermore, matter out of place (to borrow Mary Douglas’ 1966 phrase)? If not, how do they become part of a new place? How do they maintain attachments to the old place? Is home, as the old sayings go, where the heart is or where we hang our hats? Perhaps the most fundamental question, underlying the rest, is why is “home” important?



Why do we still continue to feel the need to root ourselves, to belong? I do not propose to have an answer to the latter, but would argue that despite our frequent claims to inhabit a “global village”, the apparently common human need to express some kind of connection to place is still a powerful source of both inspiration and friction in many of our lives.

These questions have implications for us in a methodological sense as well as a theoretical one. As someone who was born in (what was then) rural Colorado to New Yorker parents, brought up in suburban California, now resides in urban Scotland, and, depending upon where I am and who I am talking to, calls all of these places home, I am aware of the shifting nature of the answers to these questions. My own migrations and immigrations have had a profound impact on the anthropology I have been engaged in. I follow Lavie and Swedenburg, who argue that we must not only update our theoretical approach to the study of identity to incorporate the fact that people and populations are mobile (and that this mobility is not, in every case, a new thing), but also, as researchers, revise our classifications of “home” and “field”. They write: “For us, field and home blur, and sites of research (what used to be roughing it in the field Out There) and sites of writing (what used to be the detached contemplation at home, Here) intermingle. Out There is still home”(1996; 20). The ways one defines home will, as I have said, shift. A sense of belonging is cultivated, I argue, through social practice and through the use of symbols which may be evocative of places.

To return to Scotland now, it has been frequently argued that Scottishness is more easily located geographically than ethnically. Smout’s comment that “Modern

Scottish identity is much more firmly aligned to a sense of place than a sense of tribe-- 'I am a real Scot from Bathgate' has much more resonance than 'I am a real Scot because my granny was a real Scot'." (1994; 107) nicely summarises this interpretation. Likewise, current SNP policy states that, should Scotland become independent, rights to citizenship would be granted to all people legally resident in Scotland at the time, should they choose it. It should be said, however, that there is a notable body of popular sentiment which takes a far more controversially "ethnic" stance as to where the lines should be drawn.

The process of defining home is heavily politicised, particularly when underscored, as it is in Scotland, by nationalism. It is argued throughout this thesis that we should not speak of one nationalism in Scotland but of many nationalisms, some connected to the explicit political aims of the Scottish National Party and others driven by a less articulate desire for self-determination and a more or less inchoate sense of Scottishness, which may or may not be affiliated with any particular political party (McCrone 1992, Cohen 1996). On the other hand, some people will argue that "Scottishness" has little to do with it and that their nationalism is based upon an economic argument only (although I have to say I have rarely met an "economic" nationalist who does not, from time to time, slip into a more emotional stance).

Some of these nationalisms draw upon the exclusionary ethnocentrism that the word nationalism is often thought to embody. Although the left-leaning intelligentsia would seek to deny the efficacy (if not the existence) of such manifestations, they are there and they do seem to motivate a significant (some

would say increasing) amount of racism and anti-Englishness. The rosy picture of Scotland's left wing, tolerant nationalist movement should not become so dominant that the malign side of it can be ignored. The anthropologist of nationalism should not ignore, for example, the graffiti that appeared on a footpath across an Edinburgh park prior to the England-Scotland rugby match in February, 1998: "*English go home*" next to a swastika in yellow spray-paint. Thankfully this does not tell the entire story, which is a convoluted one indeed. I am not sure, for example, how easily anti-Englishness and racism can be linked with nationalist voting patterns; there is a body of popular opinion that argues that some unionists, as embodied in, for example, some fans of Glasgow Rangers, are as racist as they come. For every generalisation, there are many exceptions, yet, I would argue that the non-racist calls for self-determination or independence and those which rely upon xenophobia ultimately draw upon an immense emotional pool which is shared by much of the Scottish population and which bubbles to the surface in a variety of ways. Within that pool, senses of home and belonging are perhaps the most fundamental elements. It is for this reason that "*English go home*" is such a powerful statement; for many English people who have relocated themselves, Scotland *is* home and they feel as strongly about Scottish political issues as anyone else.

"Home" has emotional significance for individuals at a number of levels, or combinations thereof, which inform and shape each other in the course of daily life. Home may be as small as one's own house or flat, it may be the local community in which one lives, the city, or even the nation (or nation-state, should these two be equivalent). We may look back upon places we have left and nostalgically call them

home. Furthermore, home may not be, in every case, geographical. We might conceivably speak of being at home in the company of a particular group of people or taking part in a particular activity; as I argued in chapter six, social participation in music may aid in the imagining of communities at the local as well as national level. Rather than trying to quantify these feelings, which are not always easily articulated in English, it seems more useful to further pursue the ways in which they are formed, maintained, and expressed. If “Scottishness” as a socio-political project revolves in large part round these attachments, we must turn to the cultural practices, like folk music, which make the different versions of Scottishness relevant to individuals.

Much Scottish folk music, both instrumental and song, is deemed to be, by most of the people who perform it, firmly connected with particular places or types of places. For example, some songs make use of language which can be closely associated to particular regions, like Doric of the north-east. Other songs may be connected to regional industries, such as the east-coast fisheries or the mines of the Lothians or Fife, and may deal with specific events. Particular song traditions also contain regional associations, such as Border ballads or the bothy ballads which were sung by migrant farm labourers in the north-east. Instrumental tunes are also thought to arise out of regional styles or are written for local events or people. A tune called “Calum’s Road”, written and recorded by the band Capercaillie, has recently become popular in Edinburgh sessions. Certainly, most everyone agrees that it is a “beautiful wee tune”, but the story which inspired it seems to explain much of its popularity. The tune commemorates a crofter on Raasay (the long, thin island between Skye and Torridon on the mainland), who had requested that the local council build a road to

his croft. Having been denied the road, the man took it upon himself to build one by hand, which he did: three or four miles' worth. People often tell this story when they play the tune in sessions, and I have met people who have even been inspired to go see Calum's road on Raasay on the back of the simple march.

To perform the music is to evoke images of those places in one's own mind and in the minds of the audience. To say that these links are imagined or constructed should not imply that they are meaningless or backwardly romantic. In many cases, this process of imagination is a political one, connected to the increased interest in notions of Scottishness and the drive for self-determination. It has to do with the creation of a sense of belonging and a sense of home.

The cultural nationalism implicit in the folk revival can be seen powerfully in the frequent musical evocation of the Scottish landscape, rural life, and the injustices that have been done to both throughout the years. In some respects, this use of landscape imagery harks back to the days of romantic nationalism (though often stands in conscious critique of it), in which the essence of the nation was seen to lie in some timeless rural life which bubbled up from the very soil like a deep, peaty pool (see McCrone *et al* 1995, Schama 1995, Cosgrove & Daniels 1988). However, it would not be productive to sweep this entire process of imagining under a carpet labelled "romanticism"; it is far too complex for that. Likewise, I would argue that such imagining goes beyond what is commonly labelled "representation" (Thrift 1997) and enters the realm of experience. Ultimately, I would argue that notions of belonging and of *home*, as constructed or imagined as they may be, lie very close to the centre of personal identity (for many people, if not everybody) and are thus

keenly felt to connect us with both places and other people. This is why places and landscapes often lie at the heart of political power struggles, and this is why, also, they inspire such effective music.

### **Migratory imaginings and contested homecomings**

James Hunter begins his book *A dance called America* with the passage, written by James Boswell, which inspired his title (as it did the song of the same name by the Gaelic rock group Runrig):

In the evening the company danced as usual. We performed, with much activity, a dance which, I suppose, the emigration from Skye has occasioned. They call it *America*. Each of the couples, after the common involutions and evolutions, successively whirls round in a circle, till all are in motion; and the dance seems intended to show how emigration catches, till a whole neighbourhood is set afloat (Boswell 1984 (1773); cited by Hunter 1994; frontspiece).

Migration (emigration out of Scotland, immigration into Scotland, and migration within Scotland, collectively) is one of the most frequently arising themes within the contemporary Scottish folk music scene. What becomes clear in Boswell's passage is that this cultural concern with migration is not, actually, a new phenomenon but one which has impacted upon Scottish cultural life for over two hundred years.

Throughout much of the late nineteenth century, Scotland was second only to Ireland in the ranks of European countries witnessing widespread emigration. Popular historical memory attributes much of this haemorrhage to the Highland Clearances, but Devine (1992; 3) points out that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, up to fifty percent of Scottish emigrants came from urban,

industrialised areas rather than rural ones. This is largely attributed to the fact that population movement *within* Scotland, and particularly rural to urban migration, led to growing population density and subsequently mass unemployment within the cities (*ibid.*). The flood of migrants from rural Scotland and Ireland into the Scottish industrial areas in the mid to late nineteenth century became a cheap labour source for the factories; more skilled workers very often found it far more profitable to seek employment in North America, Australia, or England. Twentieth century emigration from Scotland, likewise, which peaked in early 1930's, was largely from industrial areas and occurred most commonly during times of economic downturn. There has also been a significant export of intellectually and scientifically trained individuals over these two centuries; this again is largely due to the limited opportunities for recognition and financial success in Scotland.

Rural emigration or rural to urban migration, however, appear to be more common and to carry more emotional weight in the artistic and musical discourses. Largely, it is the case that population loss from rural areas, both Highland and Lowland, was more *directly* the result of clearance or economic compulsion than that from industrial areas. Cowan (1994) argues that, in the nineteenth century, the Scottish Borders experienced similar changes in estate ownership and rural practices (the introduction of large sheep-farms, primarily) to those which happened in the Highlands and thus similar patterns of emigration.

It is estimated that Scotland will have undergone a net loss of around two million people to emigration in the twentieth century: a substantial percentage of a population which is now roughly five million (Lindsay 1994; 156). As I have



indicated emigration out of Scotland appears to have a direct relationship to immigration *into* Scotland (particularly from Ireland) and to internal migration. In the late twentieth century, furthermore, there has been a well-documented process of reverse-migration from urban areas into rural ones, particularly the Highlands (see Jedrej & Nuttall 1996, Macdonald 1998). The overall picture, then, is one of ongoing demographic fluidity over many generations. This movement of people has long since worked its way into many cultural expressions and explorations of Scottishness. It causes a significant amount of what might be called “nostalgic” claiming of belonging to places, and also a more intensely politicised debate over *who has the right* to do so.

One of the first things I noticed about the people I have met in the Edinburgh folk scene is how few of them actually come from Edinburgh. The majority of them are Scots, from Glasgow, from Dundee and Aberdeen, from the industrial central belt and rural or urban Fife, Perthshire and the Lothians. Some come from more rural parts of the Borders, the Northeast, or the Highlands. In addition, there are a good number of Irish people active in the scene, and quite a few English. There are a handful of Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and Americans, most of whom have some kind of familial or ancestral connection to Scotland. Likewise, it was (perhaps strangely) a surprise to me how many people speak of cousins, siblings, friends, or children in Canada, the States, or Australia. Everybody, it seems, has some direct or indirect experience of emigration. Others told me how *jealous* they were that I had grown up in California and honestly speculated about my reasons for coming to Scotland. “*I’d give my two front teeth to live in California!*” I’ve had

people say. When I told someone I met that I was planning to settle in Scotland, she laughed and said "*Bucking the migration trends, eh?*" My friends began to make me aware of the strength migration has as a cultural idiom long before I read the statistics to back it up.

The socio-cultural impact of emigration upon Irish society has been far more frequently explored than it has in Scotland. Smith writes: "While nationalism is the main way in which Irish people are called upon to see their collective relationship with larger social structures, so emigration represents a private response, apparently individual and isolated, even if grounded in historical and economic circumstances"(1994; 225).

I would argue that the same could be true, if to a slightly lesser extent, in Scotland. Nick Keir, singer/songwriter with the long-running Edinburgh folk trio The McCalmans, explores the continuing draw of London for many Scots in his song "Far down the line":

You'll have a last pint up at Leslie's on the way  
They say the beer will taste more bitter from today  
You'll take a long look at the skyline from the bridge  
And watch the morning sun explore the Old Town's ridge  
You've heard it all, you've said it all, it's time to go  
You'll find a better life in England, sure you know  
You had to smile as old friends sadly shook their heads  
*Come on, it's no the moon I'm going to, you said.*

Chorus: Now you're waiting on the London train  
And it won't be long before you leave it all behind  
There's no pipe band playing "Will ye no come back again"  
Far down the line, far down the line.

It's not for long, you'll make your money and return  
But in the morning sun you'll watch the Tweed bridge burn  
You dream the South will bring you all the things you lack  
And you can scarcely hear the land that calls you back

And when the team in blue run out you'll raise a cheer  
You can sing "The flower of Scotland" once a year  
And though you promised that you'd always keep in touch  
You were never one for letters very much

Chorus

And will you hang around the pubs in Camden Town?  
And will you let them call you Jock, the tartan clown?  
And when you're drunk at Hogmanay will you believe  
That you still mourn the land you were so keen to leave?  
And there are thousands, many thousands of your kind  
Perth and Stornoway and Kirkwall left behind  
And when they ask you why you took the long road south,  
You'll say you had no choice, there's nothing left there now

Chorus

The connection between emigration and the Irish folk revival is also well-documented. As Smith (*ibid*; 227) writes, "The first important period of recording of Irish music was from the mid-1920's to the 1940's, during which the great majority of 78 rpm recordings of Irish music was produced. Most of these recordings were of Irish-American players in America..." These recordings were often part of American record companies' efforts to appeal to the ethnic roots of various segments of the population. It is often speculated (see also Cullinane 1994, O'Connor 1991) that the Irish folk revival owes its existence largely to the desire of the Irish-American population to maintain its connection with the "old country". One of the most popular bands to appear at Glasgow's Celtic Connections festival every January has been Cherish the Ladies, comprised of six women, born and brought up in the east coast of the United States to Irish parents. They have all competed and won awards in the "All Ireland" music championships, as have the Irish-American step dancers who perform with them. This band, like the Celtic Connections festival itself, which

draws overtly on the musical connections forged by trans-Atlantic immigration, exemplifies the role the movement of people has had in the perpetuation of the music (as does the sheer number of Irish songs about the experiences of immigration). It may be safe to say that migration has ironically helped to maintain the music rather than to destroy it as one might first assume.

Certainly this is largely true of the Scottish folk revival also. That people of Scottish ancestry in North America are often described as becoming “more Scottish than the Scots”, through the playing of pipes or the wearing of kilts is only the most obvious example of this. I have known many second, third or fourth generation Americans, many of whom have never been to Scotland, who quite self-consciously become Scots (or what they imagine to be Scots) for the annual Highland Games, for Burns Night, or for the weekly Scottish country dancing lesson. This doesn’t reduce their American-ness, of course, as many amused and cringing “real” Scots will hurry to remind me, but neither does it reduce the emotional draw of the imagined homeland.

The success of performers from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in the folk scene in recent years is similarly telling. While Cape Breton fiddlers Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac (among others) perform in a style that has developed for over a century in North America, they are still often described to be proponents of a Scots musical tradition. If anything, the fact that this tradition was transported to Canada with a population may be seen by many to *strengthen* its connection to a thread of Scottish cultural and historical experience arising out of immigration.

Here, the whole process reproduces itself on a smaller scale. Immigrant “Highlanders”, second or third generation urbanites, wear the clan tartan, learn Gaelic, or contemplate buying cottages in the villages their grandparents left. People who have grown up in London or the industrial English midlands look back across the border and still identify themselves as Scots. It might not even be that the person moves, but that the place changes around him. A man in a “tarted up” pub in Leith recalls with some nostalgia the days when it was an active port. *“I can mind the whalers comin’ in here. It was another world in those days.”*

The Scottish folk revival is linked both to the emigrant population and more to contemporary processes in Scotland itself. The experiences of emigration and population movement are also fundamental in discourses *within* the folk scene. These discourses often centre around feelings of loss: loss of community, loss of way of life, loss of connection to land or local knowledge, loss of the privilege of knowing exactly where one belongs. As I discussed in the last chapter, many folk singers feel it is their duty to keep particular historical images “alive” in social memory. This process of remembering is also part of the localising of identity, because history and place are intricately linked.

Watson (1993) argues that in much Scottish literature since the eighteenth century, and particularly in the literary revival of this century, discourses about place have been one of the major modes through which to explore national identity:

Suffice it to say that an engagement with places includes both geography and history, for no landscape in Scotland is innocent of its past. More than this, it should be stressed that colloquial, vernacular, or dialect utterances cannot escape their own locations in both space and time, and indeed ‘voice’ and ‘place’ are inextricably and creatively interfused. This is all the more so

when a sense of national identity is at stake, with its need for crucial signifiers of 'difference' (1993; 112).

Likewise, Stock (1993) notes that the connection between place and history is maintained through both literary and oral traditions (Scottish folk music is both and has been so for a long time); places become imbued with symbolic significance through the telling of tales (or the singing of songs) and thus when we regard places or landscapes, we carry certain familiar metaphors in mind. Thus, much of the music is used to create or convey senses of belonging, of rootedness, and of nostalgia for places remembered.

This creation of connections can also be seen as a largely intentional redrawing of definitions of centre and periphery; regions that are very often described as peripheral in greater British discourses, such as the Highlands and Islands or the coastal Northeast, are placed in a position at the symbolic centre of the Scottish cultural and musical worlds. As has been frequently explored, the Highlands in general have come to occupy almost iconic status in representations of Scottish landscape and culture (see, for example, McCrone, *et al.* 1995; Withers 1992; Chapman 1978). When the tourist coaches roll into the narrow, spectacular eastern end of Glencoe, the piper is waiting in the lay-by at the side of the road in order to provide suitable musical accompaniment for their visual experience. The Highland glen and the pipes become the essence of Scottishness as a whole.

Folk-singers generally shun such kitsch expressions. However, the use of landscape imagery is a particularly popular and effective way of infusing a song with a sense of place. The migrant's nostalgia for the land is expressed in many songs, such as "The Wild Geese", a poem written by Violet Jacob in the 1930's and set to



music by singer Jim Reid in the 1980's. A song which almost always guarantees a moved audience, it takes the form of a conversation between a man and the northern (norlan') wind. There is no sentimental appeal to dying ways of life here or any need to explain why the traveller left home. The power of the song seems to lie in its ability to communicate a fleeting image of place, fixed in the traveller's mind like a photograph.

Oh tell me what was on yer road, ye roarin norlan' wind  
As ye've come fleein frae the land that's never frae my mind  
My feet they traivel England but I'm deein for the north.  
My man, I've seen the sillar tides run up the Firth o' Forth.

Aye wind I ken them weel eneuch and fine they fall and rise  
And feign I've seen the creepin mist on yonder shore that lies  
But tell me as ye've passed them by what saw ye on the way?  
My man I've rocked the rovin' gulls that sail abune the Tay.

But saw ye neethin leein wind, afore ye cam tae Fife?  
For there's muckle lyin yont the Tay means mair tae me nor life.  
My man I've swept the Angus braes that ye havena trod for years.  
Oh wind forgie a hameless loon wha canna see for tears.

And far beyond the Angus straths I've seen the wild geese flee  
A lang lang skein o' beatin wings, their heids towards the sea  
And aye their cryin voices trailed ahint them on the air.  
Oh wind hae mercy, haud yer wheesht, for I daurna listen mair.

One of my friends performed this song at a session one night, to a group of us who could all look to the hills and rivers of other places and call them home. The song seemed to appeal to all our memories of those other places and bring out a need to share stories about them, to actively recall them and express a sense that those places were still alive to us. To describe landscape, tell stories of local events, recall personal experiences, or to sing songs which mention those places are all ways we found to let each other (and ourselves) know we still had connections there. The



placing or localising of identity, for those of us who have been migratory in our lives, is never automatic; the question “Where do you come from?” can be one to stumble over. And yet, we still live in a social environment which portrays the natural state of affairs to be one in which people live in the places to which they belong. Imagining home, then, is less a nostalgic avoidance of ‘reality’ than it is of infusing some biographical meaning into that reality.

### **Debatable lands: landscape, rights and possession in Scotland**

Climb to the top of any of Edinburgh’s many hills on a clear day and look at the view. It is easy to see beyond the city, to where the Pentlands and the Border Hills rise to the south or to where the Trossachs and the more gentle Fife hills rise to the north and northwest. Naming hills is a game people like to play here, I’ve noticed: pointing to summits far in the distance, imagining paths and recalling familiar landscapes. My family in Colorado do that too, looking west from the plains east of Boulder to the ever-snowy front range of the Rockies; it is a familiar game. Naming is, perhaps, a way of claiming, of expressing one’s knowledge of a landscape and thus a relationship with it. As Cohen writes, looking from the top of a hill over an arduous and wet path just climbed (explaining, perhaps, part of the Scottish passion for walking and mountaineering as he does):

But there may be something more: those ineffable senses of association, ownership, of aesthetic which, even on the most dreich of days when you can hardly see your own feet, makes people regard the mountain, the view (if there is one), the path underfoot, and think, ‘H’mmm: this is special; this is mine, or ours, this massive bit of Scotland is somehow in me.’ (1996; 15).

Of course, anyone who has ever been turned away from a hill during the stalking season will realise that a “sense” of ownership means different things to different people and does not always translate itself into rights or mutual recognition.

McCrone writes: “So let us conceive of ‘land’ in a much wider way than the narrowly ‘rural’. Certainly, people living in Scotland have a much wider conception of ‘land’. That is in part because it stands for nation, for ‘Scotland’. It is also because in Scotland the ‘land question’ has never been quite settled”(1998b; 73). Land rights, land ownership, land use and land preservation are all highly contested issues in contemporary Scotland, and often come to occupy a central position in much popular culture, particularly theatre, literature, and folk music. Disagreements and conflicts between “locals” and “incomers”, the abuses of land and tenants by absentee landlords, and more recently, the economic hardships caused to farmers by the current strength of the pound, often come into a nationalist discourse as symbols of the pressures put upon Scottish land and its dwellers by outside forces. The fact that incomers to rural communities (particularly in the Highlands but it happens elsewhere as well) from urban Scotland and England are frequently called “white settlers” (the colonial implications are not lost on many people) exemplifies the depth of emotion and antagonism which surrounds the shifting population (Jedrej and Nuttall 1995).

Concepts of home and localness have become popular themes within the anthropology of Britain (see, for example, Cohen 1982 & 1986, Nadel-Klein 1991, Chapman 1992, Jedrej & Nuttall 1996, Macdonald 1998) and are increasingly seen as subjects of politicised debate and contest. Rights are called into question over and

over again and are acknowledged according to different rules at different levels of social organisation. At the highest level, large estates in rural Scotland (and particularly the highlands) have been treated as commodities available for purchase by anyone with enough money, *despite* the fact that estate-ownership brings the responsibilities of sitting tenants. Future Scottish parliamentary legislation may change the laws surrounding land ownership, however.

At a much smaller level, the purchase of crofts or holiday homes by incomers can become the stage for conflict over definitions of rights: the incomers' right to find a new rural life against what at times seems the incompatible counter-claim to the right to 'indigenous' economic and cultural survival. The questions being debated have to do not only with who has the right to own land, as a commodity, and to occupy it but with who has the right to claim belonging to the land in an emotional sense. They also have to do with the relationship between urbanites or suburbanites claiming of the land as a kind of national patrimony and rural locals claiming the land as their livelihood or inheritance.

One event brought many of these issues to light during my fieldwork and made explicit the connection between rural local politics and wider national ones.

*Not the landowner's ball: the Isle of Eigg benefit ceilidh*  
2 November, 1996

*"It seems the only way we're going to get self-determination in this country is if we buy it back, bit by bit."* The crowd laughed, cynically and in agreement. Elaine C. Smith, Scottish comedienne and actress, waited for the applause to die down

before continuing. *"First we'll buy Eigg. Then Inverness. Maybe then we'll buy Glasgow, though I haven't heard any bids for Govan yet."* (Govan, the somewhat notorious docklands area of Glasgow, is the setting for the BBC programme "Rab C. Nesbitt", in which Smith plays "Mary Doll", the wife of the title character.) The audience laughed and cheered again and Smith continued to rant away in a similar fashion for a few minutes before introducing the first act, singer Dick Gaughan.

My friends and I were sitting on the wooden dance floor in the Assembly Rooms along with some seven hundred others, watching the line-up of big names in the Scottish folk musical world: Dick Gaughan, Michael Marra, Karen Matheson (singer from Capercaillie). Later there would be ceilidh dancing, or rather, the more or less rhythmic jostling and occasional colliding of bodies that passes for dancing in a room filled to capacity. Shooglenifty, the successful Edinburgh-based band who can only really be described as "rave ceilidh" would finish up the night in their usual manic, sweaty, and intensely physical way. In between each musical act, people got up and spoke: Elaine C. Smith, journalist Leslie Riddoch, and later, the islanders who had been travelling through late-autumn storms for two days and had barely arrived in time.

It is likely not by accident that ceilidhs have become so popular for fundraising or rallying support for causes like this particular one. The sort of social set dancing done at ceilidhs often has the power to create bonds between people, in that it allows strangers to be physically close in a way that is not permitted elsewhere. These bonds do not necessarily become anything more than the briefest meetings of hands or arms and exchanges of smiles, but even this limited physical

contact is hugely greater than that which is allowed in the street or other public sphere. After having spun through a whole dance with someone, it is far harder to refuse when they ask for a donation than it would be were they shaking a can on the street, where one could simply look at one's feet and scuttle past. Likewise, after the dancing ended and we all stood there together, sweating and trying to catch our breaths, when the islanders (who had been down on the floor, dancing away) got up to make their speeches, everyone listened far more intently than they had to the big-names earlier in the evening.

It was not a political rally. Or rather, it was not intended as such but, considering the time, place and nature of the gathering, had perhaps inevitably become so (it was six months before the general election and not quite a year before the devolution referendum). How could it not? It was the "Not the landowner's ball", a ceilidh and concert to raise funds for the roughly sixty inhabitants of Eigg, who were collectively attempting to buy their island. Hardly two years earlier, the tiny Hebridean island, which lies to the south of the south-eastern tip of Skye, had been purchased by an eccentric German artist who called himself Maruma. When Maruma first bought the island from the previous unpopular absentee landlord, Keith Schellenberg, he apparently raised tenants' hopes by promising to be an accessible, responsive, and present landlord.

However, included in the bargain were five or six dozen people (either permanent or part-time residents) and their homes, a community which survived without mains electricity or water, without proper rubbish removal facilities, and without a pier capable of mooring the Cal-Mac ferry. Maruma's promises to upgrade

the roads, the pier, the buildings and the rest of the island's crumbling infrastructure were unfulfilled, and when he finally decided to sell out, the islanders spurred themselves into action. The ceilidh at the Assembly Rooms was only one small event in what became huge fund-raising bid; it likely did more to raise awareness than money. It brought the hardships of the island into Edinburgh and into the ornate and over-heated confines of the crowded ballroom. The islanders' descriptions and photographs of life on the island, rusted cars, rubbish heaps and rats included, were penetratingly vivid (see Ardener 1987; 46). There could be no Sir Walter Scot-ish romanticisation of the Highlands and Islands that night.

I was overwhelmed by a feeling that many of the people there that night were not there purely out of an interest in the affairs of a handful of islanders. Land rights and ownership in rural Scotland, while directly affecting a minority of the population, have long been profoundly important issues in Scottish politics going at least as far back as the 1745 Jacobite uprising and the beginnings of the Highland clearances. It was not just Eigg everyone was talking about, it was Scotland. A foreign absentee landlord was, in many ways, symbolic of what many people felt to be a foreign absentee government. As McCrone argues, "... 'land reform' is actually about a more general process of democratising Scotland" (1998b; 73-74). The overt agenda that night might have been Eigg, but self-determination and the right of Scottish people to control Scottish affairs was the much broader complex of issues on which the whole campaign rested. "*In 1979, we voted for a parliament,*" Dick Gaughan barked with characteristic intensity as he tuned his guitar before launching

into his first song, Brian McNeill's "No gods". *"We're still waiting for it. I'm still waiting for the day Scotland becomes a socialist republic."*

Perhaps what struck me most about the event, as about so much of this sort of debate, is the selectivity of ways in which people's claims to "ownership" or "rights" over places are legitimised. One of the islanders took the microphone and made an impassioned speech about how tired he was of foreigners (and Germans in particular) encroaching upon his land and livelihood; although nobody overtly confronted him, I heard a number of quieter comments indicating that many people were, actually, uncomfortable with his words. Yet, the island's main spokeswoman turned out to be, originally, from Lancashire.

I am acquainted with another English woman who has a caravan on the island and spends much of her free time there, with her partner who is a full-time resident. She was involved in the campaign and regards the island as her second home. She tells me that she has heard plenty of anti-English sentiment on the island but that as time has gone by, she has come to feel that it is less directly aimed at her than it is at some stereotypical vision of "the English". She has said that she has found the best way to be "accepted" is to involve herself in the affairs of the island and embrace life there; it is a case of making oneself belong in a physical as well as emotional sense. One of the biggest gripes about Maruma was the fact that, after promising to live on the island himself and experience the conditions there, he never spent more than a handful of days there. We see, then, that to claim ownership in strictly a financial sense, without any effort to cultivate a more personal or physical sense of belonging, perhaps poses one of the greatest problems for absentee landlords. Belonging



implies not only a person's claims upon a place but also the place's claims upon the person; there are responsibilities to the land and to the community.

Speaking to people at the ceilidh, I found that most of them claimed some kind of connection with the island, even if that contact had only been (like mine) a short visit. They had been there once or knew someone who lived there. Or the contact was a more political one; land reform was something they felt to be central to a self-determinist agenda. None of the singers had songs about Eigg in particular, but they all had songs about Scotland, from Dick Gaughan's growling socialist proclamations to Karen Matheson's haunting Gaelic laments for a Highland life long vanished. In many ways, Eigg became Scotland (or at least, rural Scotland) writ small: a patch of land whose remote beauty had placed it at the centre of an embittered power struggle. Its name now signified much more than simply an island; it signified a political debate with which we were all familiar and it signified a chapter in an ongoing history. Placenames become effective carriers of social memory; for those who share in that social memory in a specific or general sense, Glencoe is not just a particularly dramatic glen, just as Wounded Knee is not just an open plain. Discourses about these places are thus politicised: "The story is something told, talked about and written about. It is a 'discourse'. The telling of the discourse of the countryside is a practical activity with practical ends in mind"(Frake 1996; 92).

### **Where the music comes from: landscape and musical inspiration**

The old feelings; the belief that rocks and rivers and mountains are inhabited by spirits--they're not just shapes--they're three dimensional beings...I think

that that tune [‘Port na bPúcaí’, a slow air] is a lovely way of bringing that out, which is the reason I like to play it.

---Tony MacMahon, Clare accordion player; quoted by O’Connor (1991; 19)

Some of us in the group of instrumentalists I played with had, one day, brought in tunes we had written. Tom’s tune was called “Laura Anne’s stovies”. In explanation, he told us that Laura Anne was a friend he once stayed with after a day of winter climbing in Torridon. *“You ken when you come in from climbing or hillwalking and you’re so knackered and soaked tae the skin. She’d made up this big pot of stovies and the smell was all through the house. Beautiful, you ken? A plate of stovies and a beer and a warm bath and I just thought I was in heaven. Such a good feelin’ I promised her I’d write a tune about that wee moment. This is it, but I don’t know whether it communicates it or not.”*

My own tune was named “The road to Inveroran”, a particularly beautiful spot two friends and I literally stumbled across midway up the West Highland Way in September 1996. A fiddler named Sara played a slow reel she had written. “Spring rain” it was called, and she had written it after a muddy weekend’s gardening in the back of her tenement flat in Edinburgh. She told us she wanted it to mimic the warm, heavy drops as they landed in the soft earth and splattered against the stone wall, starting quietly and gathering strength.

All tunes, even the simplest eight-line jigs, have names. They are named for people, named for places, named for events. (Another woman in the class came in with a joyful tune entitled “Mayday Jig”, in honour of the result of the general election). To say they are commemorative perhaps explains them best. Places and landscape features provide perhaps the most common sorts of titles for tunes, and

tunes are often written to intentionally mimic natural features or sounds: “Loch Torridon”, “The Spey in spate”, “The hills of Glen Orchy”, etc. Naming one’s compositions after places is not a random process; tunes generally arise out of places people know or of which they have some kind of experience. The music, arises, in other words, out of a relationship between the writer and the place. As represented in music, landscape is not just a *natural* place but one in which humans live, work, play, and become inspired.

“Scotland has one major feature which embellishes its presentation, its association with the ‘wilderness.’ ...After all, the claim [by the tourist industry, drawing upon Romantic imagery] is that Scotland is the last great European wilderness” (McCrone, Morris & Kiely 1995; 200). The Highlands have been particularly laden with this description and, owing largely to Romantic literature and subsequently the tourist industry, have become equated in many minds with Scotland in general.

But if any of Scotland, even the remotest parts of the Highlands, is wilderness, it is a wilderness of human making in more ways than one. As James Hunter reminds us (1976), many now uninhabited areas were purposely depopulated in the nineteenth century to make way for large-scale sheep farming and deer stalking. Hunter also argues that the Clearances have worked their way deep into the social memory of contemporary Highlanders and now inform present political positions and relations with landowners, incomers and politicians (*ibid.*).

Ardener, similarly, writes: “The Highlands are, as a whole, a great monument at one level to a Malthusian experiment on a disastrous scale that filled most of the

nineteenth century. Within a total landscape with ruins (and few human figures) nest many smaller landscapes with their own lesser ruins” (1987; 46). Here we see how emigration has actually shaped the very landscape. Apparently empty hillsides and moorlands reveal outlines of stones which mark where croft houses once stood: entire hamlets in places which are now devoid of human habitation. On the ruins of natural and man-made landscapes, Campbell writes:

...I was in the Scottish hills looking down on the remains of what they still call the ‘Old Caledonian forest’, as if it had never been in a real time nor in a real country; a matter of myths and mysteries, maybe. So little of it was left there; just a defiant band of pine trees, gloomy and dark, straggling across the hillside, hunched against the wind, looking over their shoulders at the empty slopes all round them.

You can’t get a feeling for a vanished forest like that. The loss is like a bereavement, like a yearning to know which will never be satisfied. I was sitting at some small ruins, a shieling most likely, from a time when Gaelic was spoken in these areas—a dialect of Gaelic that is now extinct. I’ll never know that wood, just as I’ll never hear the words of those who have gone. All I can do is let my fantasy wander amongst whatever mythy fragments my memory might be able to make images out of (1995; 2).

As my two friends and I walked the West Highland Way, we realised that much of the path was not built for the benefit of trekkers, but rather a series of old drovers’ roads and military roads, which conveyed people and animals, and also socio-political power structures, across the hills and moors throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further north, part of what is now the A835 which wraps around the coast of Wester Ross and Loch Broom towards Ullapool, was once known as Destitution Road, because it was along that way that cleared crofters travelled when their homes had been destroyed. Brian McNeill has written a song called “Destitution road”, which follows what might have happened to those people later, on ships and in North America.

Anthropology has in the past been guilty of neglecting the centrality of landscape in its studies of cultural, aesthetic, and artistic practices. This has, in recent years, begun to change, as volumes such as those by Hirsh and O'Hanlon (1995) and Bender (1993) attest. Rather than treating landscape as something we merely exist within and utilise for economic purposes, we have begun to examine the ways in which we create that landscape and it creates us. Landscapes are created both by nature and "...carved out by axe and plough..."(Olwig 1993; 311). They are lived-in (Bloch 1995). In fact, we do not even have to live within a particular landscape for it to have vast personal or social significance for us. As Cosgrove writes:

Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements, and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtains, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal (1984; 271).

There is still a common tendency, however, to draw a distinction between Western formulations (and those of other (post)industrialised populations) of landscape, which portray it as "other" and external to ourselves, and those made by people who are still deemed to live within nature, who believe themselves to be part of it. For example, Ellen and Fukui write: "In Western notions, nature is most obviously recognisable as what is 'out there', what is not ourselves and 'that which can take care of itself'"(1996; 7). This dichotomy, I would argue, arises out of both a still somewhat habitual process of "occidentalising" (Carrier 1994), in which the Developed West is often portrayed as homogenous and a-cultural, and out of a more romantic tendency to link nature with the unknown or the "primitive". I do not believe such a distinct dichotomy should be drawn (though of course our relationships with landscape change as our situations change) and would argue that

even in the west, we find ways of making ourselves feel connected to or part of landscapes.

Steven Feld argues that “ecological” studies (or those which focus upon the relationships between humans and their environments) have traditionally prioritised the economic and material aspects of this relationship and neglected the aesthetic ones. By aesthetics, he refers to that which has to do with what people perceive to be “affective” or “sensuous” (1996b; 66). He explores the ways in which Kaluli people of highland Papua New Guinea use song in order to map the rainforest and, by mimicking the song of birds in their own singing, enact their belief that there is no difference between the human and natural worlds (birds are thought to be human spirits and thus their song reminds people of the constant presence of those spirits in the forest).

In contemporary Scotland, clashes arising out of differing uses and interpretations of landscape have become familiar. The common aesthetic sense that Scotland is a more “natural” place than England becomes central in politicised debates. A stream of popular discourse infuses environmental issues with a sort of cultural nationalism. Issues from land-ownership reform to the BSE crisis frequently become stages from which people proclaim “We know how to look after our land, *they* don’t,” or “We know how to live with our land, not against it.” In some contexts, these sorts of debates contain similarities to those which take place in other parts of the world. On many occasions I have heard people identify parallels between the experiences of Highlanders and those of Native American populations. Highlanders in particular are often represented to hold claim to land as “indigenous”

people (singer Dougie Maclean has an album entitled *Indigenous*). As such, they are often thought to have a deep knowledge of the land and how to care for it: "...a communal and inalienable interest in the use and protection of all land resources..."(Feit 1985; 34).

Many musicians I have encountered like to argue that Scottish (and Irish) music and song arises out of a culture which prioritised a close and caring relationship between people and land (again, expressing the idea that the type of landscape that matters is not actually one devoid of human influence but rather occupied and worked). The sleeve notes for a disc by the Irish banjo/mandolin player Mick Moloney describes the tunes as carrying "the old smell of turf". Dougie Maclean has written numerous songs about how a harmony between people and land in Scotland (particularly in his native Perthshire) was disrupted by clearances and by the fading of Gaelic. Of contemporary Scottish folk singers, Maclean makes the most of the symbolic place of land and landscape in the construction of national identity. Although his singing style is gentle, many of his songs make firm statements about who belongs on the land, and who doesn't. In fact, some amateur singers I know have expressed discomfort with Maclean's songs because they see them to be too exclusively nationalistic.

On the other hand, Dick Gaughan frequently sings a Burns song entitled "Now westlin winds", which he has introduced in concert as an eighteenth century environmentalist song. Gaughan's interpretation of it as an early environmentalist song is more revealing of contemporary political agendas than it is, necessarily, of Burns' own. Likewise, although the song is neither written in Scots nor textually



places itself within Scotland, the fact that it was written by Burns is enough for contemporary Scottish singers to claim it as a *Scottish* song. The song's landscape is a well ordered, pastoral one, in which every species of bird mentioned has its place; this order is disrupted not by the farmer (who too must have his place in the landscape), but by the hunter who kills purely for sport:

Now westlin winds and slaughtering guns  
Bring autumn's pleasant weather.  
The moorcock springs on whirring wings  
Among the blooming heather.  
Now waving grain, wild o'er the plain  
Delights the weary farmer  
The moon shines bright as I rove at night  
To muse upon my charmer.

The partridge loves the fruitful fells  
The plover loves the mountain  
The woodcock haunts the lonely dells  
The soaring hern the fountain.  
Through lofty groves the cushat roves  
The path of man to shun it  
The hazel bush o'erhangs the thrush  
The spreading thorn, the linnet.

Thus every kind their pleasure find  
The savage and the tender  
Some social join, in leagues combine  
Some solitary wander  
Avaunt! Away! the cruel sway  
Tyrannic man's dominion  
The sportsman's joy, the murdering cry  
The fluttering, gory pinion

But Peggy dear the evening's clear  
Swift flies the skimming swallow  
The sky is blue, the fields in view  
All fading green and yellow  
Come let us stray our gladsome way  
And view the charms o' nature  
The rustling corn, the fruited thorn  
And every happy creature.

We'll gently walk and sweetly talk  
Till silent moon shine clearly  
I'll grasp thy waist and fondly pressed  
Swear how I love thee dearly  
Not vernal showers to budding flowers  
Not autumn to the farmer  
So dear can be as thou to me  
My fair, my lovely charmer.

As this chapter has shown, the creation of a sense of place, and a sense of *connection* to place, is a highly politicised process which occupies a central role in folk musical composition and performance. Historical trends such as migration have played an enormous role in the shaping of contemporary Scotland, as do contemporary interpretations of Scotland's landscapes. Landscape comes, thus, to occupy a vital position in the shaping of social memory, and in many notions of what it means to be Scottish. Folk musicians do not represent Scotland's landscape as a purely natural place but as something which has been shaped by human activity and history; in so doing, they are further creating a sense of belonging to that landscape, and to Scotland itself.

## IX: Conclusion

At a wedding in July 1998, I spoke to the father of one of my musical friends: a man of whom I'd heard much but had never previously met. We fell into a conversation about folk music and the contemporary music scene and I found him to be a man with well-formulated and eloquently articulated views on the subject. Inadvertently, he pulled together many of the themes I have been addressing in this work. His words stand out vividly in my mind:

*My mother is 94 years old. She's from the Northeast of Scotland and she knows hundreds of songs--songs you'll never see printed in any book. She often doesn't remember my name, but if you catch her on a good day, she remembers the songs. She remembers every word. My commitment to the music comes from her. I have always felt an obligation to her and to that music to keep it alive, you know. We have such a wealth in those songs. Now, both my kids sing and play guitar, so I've done that. I've passed it on, and they'll pass it on. But I also feel obliged as a Scot. This is part of who we are-- we'd lose a big part of our identity if we forgot this music. Now these people who want to turn it into a fine art and try to tell you that you've got to be a professional musician in order to sing or play this stuff-- they're the ones who will help it die off. This isn't about trained voices and virtuosos—it's about being who you are and expressing yourself, no matter what.*

What comes through most powerfully in this man's statement is the need to see the music continue as part of Scottish social life: the need to hand it down and do one's part in ensuring that it continues to have some relevance, particularly in young minds. In this sense, he is insisting to me that the traditional aspects of the music and its performance are central in his motivation for singing and teaching his own daughter and son. At the same time, his words contain also the insistence that the music is not seen as a museum piece to be preserved and displayed by experts. It is, rather, part of what is still deemed to be a living tradition.

The main thread I have drawn through these chapters has been the idea that national identity is created through practice and performance rather than objectively located in particular cultural forms. My main argument is that performance, of music in this case, can be seen as a link between individual experience and the creation of social identity. Through folk and traditional music, people are involved in the building and expression of versions of national identity. In other words, the national identity that is relevant to individuals is an ongoing process in the making rather than something which contains identifiable, and thus exclusive, characteristics. I have focused upon music as only one cultural form in which we can observe the ways in which national identity and aspects of nationalism are generated. There are, of course, many others.

For the people I know, folk and traditional music is particularly effective in this process for two reasons. First, as I explored mainly in chapter six, music is an affective force at both the individual and social levels. It has the power to bring people together and unite them in what they may perceive to be a powerful collective experience (although as I have said, the pursuit of this collective experience may be more common than the actual achievement of it). Through this performance, music and musicianship become central aspects in individual identities and inform the ways in which people conceptualise their own social lives and social positions. By being a musician and learning from or performing with other musicians, one thus establishes relationships with others and enters physically into the “carrying stream” of the folk tradition.

Second, Scottish music maintains symbolic connections with and makes reference to many facets of Scottish life, past and present. Through music, people

can explore aspects of past life and then incorporate those into a body of social memory which feeds their own senses of national identity. Similarly, music allows people to maintain or establish geographic connections with regions or particular localities which may have some meaning in their lives: music aids in the cultivation of roots and a sense of belonging. Music can allow people to engage with Scots and Gaelic languages, or with other aspects of what is perceived as Scottish cultural tradition.

Music links past and present in many ways, then. However, while a sense of continuity is important for performers, most of them do not treat music as a sacred object which must not be altered or re-interpreted. Rather, artistic licence and innovation enters constantly into the folk scene, to the extent that the music must be seen to be a traditional but at the same time contemporary genre. While the idea of tradition and the perception of traditionality are important, *authenticity* does not enter so frequently into musicians' discourses. The majority of musicians I know are well aware of the problematic nature of the word and do not believe it can be more than an arbitrary label. To simply approach their music and their performances as inauthentic efforts to re-create a particular ethnic guise would have been a pointless exercise; they know there is more to what they do than that.

One of the hallmarks of recent anthropology has been a departure from a strict equation of "culture" to "place", or of populations to spaces with neatly defined borders. Certainly, such an effort is justified and more accurately reflects the complex realities most of us inhabit. Gupta and Ferguson argue: "Rather than simply a domain of sharing and commonality, culture figures here more as a site of difference and contestation..."(1997; 5). One of the dangers of this approach,

however, is that we may overlook the ways in which people themselves create attachments to places, to histories and cultural traditions, or to nations. To say that these entities are not easily defined (or even definable) is true, but to say that they are no longer important is not. The Internet and other globalising technologies do not eradicate a widespread human propensity to want roots, in soil and/or in culture. In fact, as the world grows smaller and cultural forms travel with increasing ease, the need to identify roots, or to generate them, may even grow. Instead of automatically treating these efforts with deconstructive cynicism, I suggest we investigate the reasons for their continued existence and the uses to which they are put in social life. As anthropologists, we should always be aware of the dangers of reifying a right wing or exclusionary rhetoric when we speak of the nation and of cultural tradition. However, as the musicians I know illustrate, it *is* possible to use these concepts without retreating into an isolationist and exclusionary discourse.

As discussed in chapters four and five, I do not regard the late twentieth century folk revival to be an escape from modern reality into some kind of idealised past. Frith writes: "Whether we're talking about Finnish dance halls in Sweden, Irish pubs in London, or Indian film music in Trinidad, we're dealing not just with nostalgia for 'traditional sounds', not just with a commitment to 'different' songs, but also with experience of alternative modes of social interaction" (1996; 124). The Scottish folk revival is, then, both a product of and comment about, contemporary social, political and economic changes. It is thus linked with the rise of nationalism and the current process of devolution in a powerful, if perhaps indirect, manner. As stressed, Scottish nationalism is viewed in this thesis as a complex of related sentiments which manifest themselves in many ways. They can be, and sometimes

are, revealed in ugly displays of anti-Englishness and ethnocentrism, but this is not the only story. They can be channelled into an explicit party-political drive toward, in the case of the SNP, complete independence, or into a rather less well formulated sense that some kind of home rule would be a good idea. They can also be revealed in a prioritisation of Scottish cultural and artistic forms of expression, such as language, literature, theatre and music.

The lasting achievement of the Scots-renaissance era writers (notably Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Edwin Muir, Neil Gunn), for all their personal disagreements, was to assert that to express oneself culturally and intellectually *as a Scot* did not need to imply that one was somehow backward, provincial, or peripheral. Likewise, it did not need to draw upon a romantic vision of an ancient, and long dead, nation. Following these writers' examples, later artists, writers and musicians began to turn, increasingly, to what they felt to be particularly Scottish modes of expression. As McCreadie comments, artistic figures involved in the Scottish cultural revival have, since those first efforts, increasingly operated with "...a conviction that there is nothing provincial or inferior about addressing universal human concerns through literature, drama, art and song rooted in historical or contemporaneous Scottish experience" (1991; 39). Among the generation inspired by the work of figures such as MacDiarmid were people like Hamish Henderson, who approached Scottish folk song with Gramsci's thoughts on the political value of folk culture in mind.

While the despised Conservative governments of the eighties and nineties may have provided the final impetus to vote for devolution, we must recognise that these changes arise out of a greater socio-political process that has been a long time



in the making. The political changes which have now begun to occur have both fuelled and been fuelled by the growing cultural pride which reveals itself in a vibrant literary, musical and theatrical atmosphere. The Edinburgh folk musical scene has been a fruitful arena in which to observe this relationship between art, politics, and the making of national identity.

What this sort of work can provide, then, is a way in which to approach nationalism and national identity at the local, everyday level. It sheds light on the ways in which individuals regard and seek to influence governmental changes, and also upon the ways in which they express disagreement with aspects of those changes. I have examined the ways, also, in which individual understandings of the nation are influenced by media and academic representations, and how these then feed back into individual senses of identity. I have represented Scottish nationalism here as multifaceted and rather more amorphous than have many previous observers. This particular work has not been designed in order to generate a new overarching definition of Scottish nationalism or theory of nationalism generally. Rather, its purpose has been to attempt to reach a greater understanding about how nationalism touches everyday life and how that everyday life responds to it and shapes it.

I have only been able to glimpse how this process works within the specific artistic community with which I have been involved, and would suggest that other segments of Scottish society would likely reveal other understandings and interpretations of current socio-political history. While Scottish nationalism and a time of political change have provided the rough frame for this work, I am aware that many of my observations must be firmly placed within the musical scene. For people involved with it, folk and traditional music shapes understandings about the

nation and about nationalism; music is central in their lives and in their constructions of Scottishness. It is personal nationalism (Cohen 1996) filtered through musical performance.

Thus, while nationalism is a major theme of this work, so too is the music itself. My work has revealed to me, as I hope it does to the reader, the extent to which music has a power to shape our political understandings and our social relationships. This power is far greater than the simple expression of pre-existing ideas or reflection of already held values; it is the power to rile people, to encourage them to think or act in particular ways. This power is exemplified in the Glasgow Rangers' vice-chairman Donald Findlay's singing of unionist sectarian songs following the team's recent victory in the Scottish Cup final. Although Findlay dismissed these songs as "folk songs" (the word harmless is thus implied), he was forced to resign his position with the club (*The Scotsman*; 1/6/99). Whether we define "The Sash" (and its like) as a folk song or not, it is not harmless. Neither is "The Fields of Atherry", sung by Celtic supporters. Most of the musicians (though not all of them) I know will avoid this sort of football tribalism, but they too are aware of the latent power within music. They are aware, too, that this power is released through performance, the results of which depend heavily upon the context and nature of that performance. Speaking of Irish music, Stoke comments: "The expression 'diddle-de-dee' music, by its detractors, suggests a world of harmlessly folkish and essentially 'Irish' concerns. 'Irish Traditional' music is however one of the many ways in which public recreational space is intensely politicised"(1994; 9).

Music is both a statement and a generator of ideas, and through it, people both consume and produce culture. Nevertheless, anthropology still often tends to

relegate it, and its performance, to the footnotes of mainstream ethnographies or to label it as a special interest. A greater focus upon music would, I suggest, offer social anthropologists a tremendous wealth of information about the processes of identity-building and social life. As anthropology moves further away from the traditional village studies, we will have to continue to find new ways of accessing places where people come together, establish social relationships, and explore their ideas about who they are. Music generates such places.

Conversely, a specifically anthropological approach also has much to offer to the study of music more generally. As I have said, participant observation and ethnography can offer us ways of getting inside the performance itself, of understanding music at a deeper level than an analysis of texts and lyrics can reveal. As we sing along or tap our feet or dance, we begin to connect the textual and symbolic aspects of the sounds with the physical techniques of *making* them. Through an involvement as performers and as listeners, rather than simply as observers, we gain another set of tools for understanding what music does: “Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives”(Frith 1996; 124).

The existence of Scotland as a nation after three hundred years of statelessness owes much to imaginative cultural narratives. Poets, novelists and ballad makers have all had their role to play in imagining the nation. Now, at last, the politicians are following suit. The process of nation building is, in this time and place, quite a literal one.

Ethnographers have often, in the past, been accused of representing their chosen communities as frozen in time. The use of the “ethnographic present” in writing is thought to imply that the winds of change do not touch the places we chose to study. Of course, they do, and the Scotland represented in these pages is being swept by a whirlwind. Although nobody can predict what will happen as the parliament comes into effect, this is a time for looking forward and imagining the future. It seems apt to conclude, then, with the first lines of Hamish Henderson’s great internationalist song, “The freedom come all ye”:

Roch the wind in a clear day’s dawin  
Blaws the clouds heelster-gowdy o’er the bay  
But there’s mair nor a roch wind blawin  
O’er the great glen o’ the world the day.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roch the wind in a clear day’s dawin: A rough wind in a clear day’s dawn  
Blaws the clouds heelster-gowdy: Blows the clouds head over heels  
But there’s mair nor a roch wind blawin: But there’s more than a rough wind blowing...  
O’er the great glen o’ the world the day: Over the world today

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